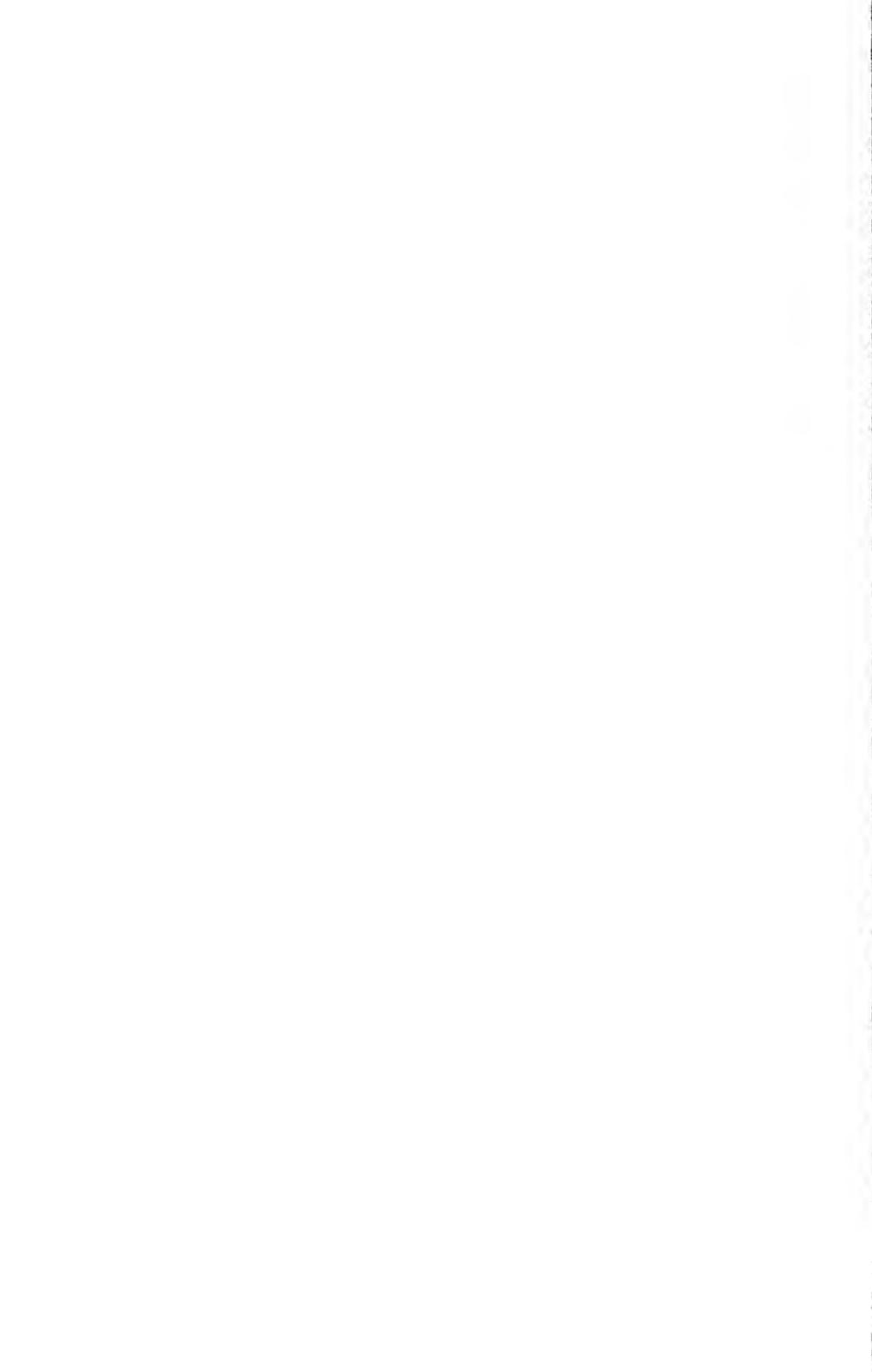
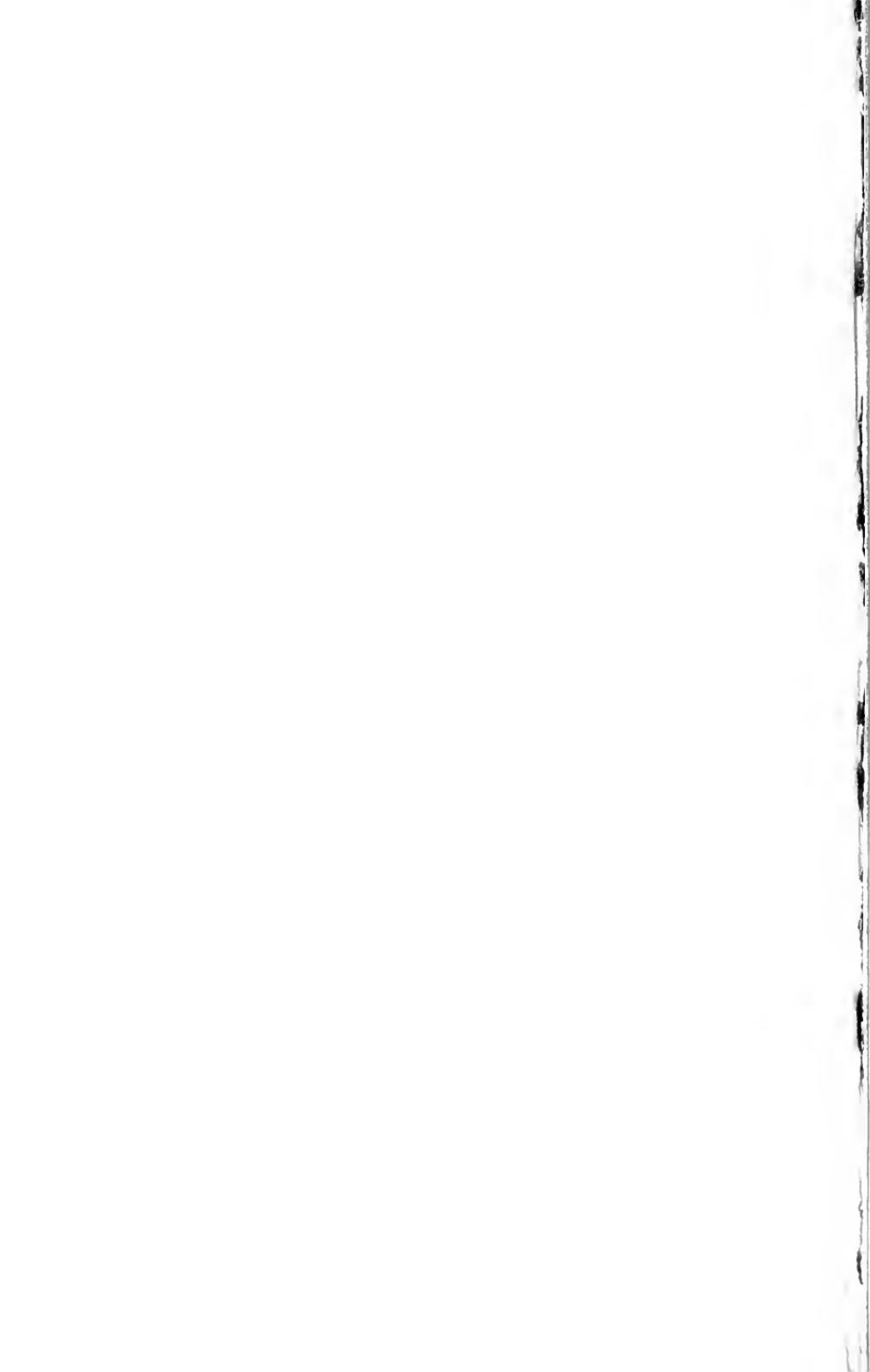


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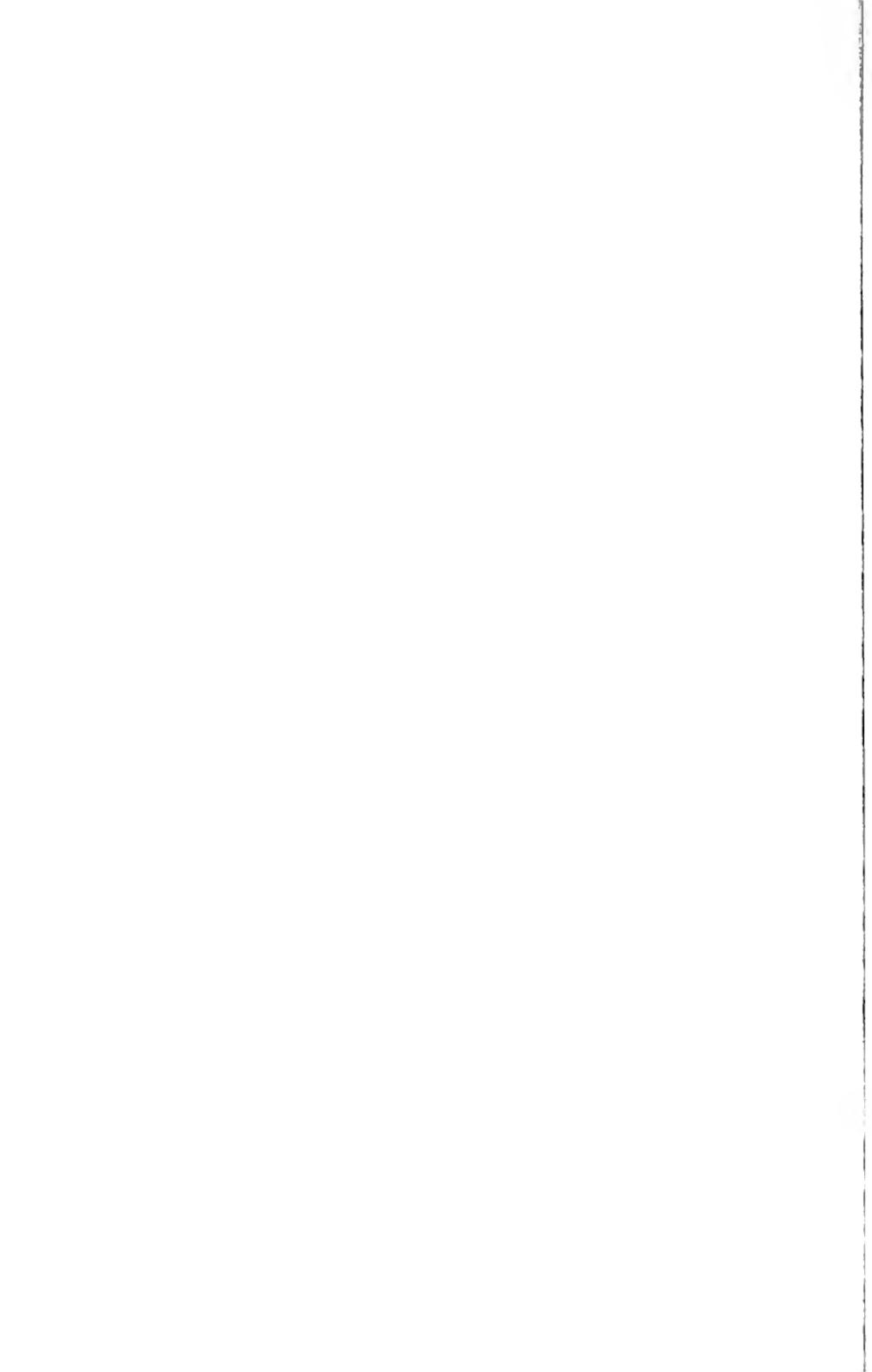






THE PLAYS OF
HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

VOLUME ONE







HUBERT HENRY DAVIES.

at the age of thirty-one

THE PLAYS OF
HUBERT HENRY DAVIES
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
HUGH WALPOLE

VOLUME ONE

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INTRODUCTION

I

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES was born on the 30th March 1869 at Woodley in Cheshire. He was the fourth child of William Henry and Martha Davies. William Henry Davies came of a long line of Welsh Nonconformist divines and was born at Ludlow, on the Shropshire border of Wales, in the year 1837. It would probably have been difficult to find any more remarkable survival of primitive Puritanism down the generations than that instanced by Will Davies and his ancestors. Since the days before the Commonwealth they had held fast their faith, permitting no development in respect either of its precept or its practice ; and in matters of doctrine and Sabbath observance Will Davies, at the end of the nineteenth century, saw eye to eye with the forefather who had been shot at in his Welsh pulpit for preaching Nonconformity at the beginning of the seventeenth. The problem for the student of heredity is—how did the writer of some of the gayest comedies in the English language come to grow on so stiff and uncompromising a stock ?

But though Hubert Henry's early environment was entailed upon him by the stern tradition of his father, he was by temperament much more akin to his mother. Martha Davies's father had begun life as a workman in an iron-foundry at Hyde in Cheshire, but having a strain of inventiveness in him he lifted himself out of this laborious level, dying in early middle age the master of his own ironworks. His wife, who came from the same humble class as himself, worked in her girlhood at a

neighbouring cotton mill, only quitting her spindles the day before her marriage. From these parents Martha inherited a natural simplicity and dignity of character ; and without being in the least intellectual she was endowed with a fine and quick perception to which a temper was given by the admirable education which her father contrived for her. She suffered from great physical weakness almost all her life, and this, together with the rigid home discipline imposed by her husband, severely restricted both her own life and that of her young children.

The first years of young Hubert's life were spent in a smoky suburb of Manchester, where the distance was everywhere shut out by bricks and mortar and where the sky overhead was never clear. In those early days his only form of outdoor sport was running or walking on cinder roads and stone pavements, and his only contact with nature was the tending of a sycamore sapling and a monkey-flower plant that grew in the tiny plot of earth apportioned to him in the dreary back garden. When he was eight years old his family removed to Wilmslow, a Cheshire village some twelve miles from Manchester. Here for a space he knew the freedom of green fields and wide skies ; and it was during these impressionable years of his boyhood that he unconsciously absorbed the atmosphere that later on characterised his comedies of simple domestic life. Not that the people in his plays were ever drawn direct from life ; there is nowhere in his characterisation anything approaching to portraiture, though it may be noted in passing that the majority of the names he gave to his characters were locally familiar to him in the Wilmslow days. When he had reached the age of eleven he was sent to a little school in the village as preparatory to the Grammar School in Manchester, whither he soon departed ; but in 1886, the father's affairs having become seriously involved, the family went back again to live in Manchester, and at the age of seventeen Hubert was taken from school and put into business.

The story of his life could be told in very few lines. Outwardly it was singularly uneventful and devoid of incident, but between the end of his school days and the beginning of his success as a dramatist he lived through

years of very intense subjective drama—drama that was by no means chiefly comedy. During the long slow-moving time of boyhood his life had been a happy, humdrum affair enough, and the glamour of his own vivid vitality and imagination hid from him the extreme narrowness of his environment ; but when youth came, quickening all the springs of his being and opening the eyes of his self-consciousness, he began to be aware of the larger possibilities which life contained, and thence-forward his soul entered into rebellion against the cramping traditions of his lot. When the time came for him to be broken into business he was, by a strangely unhappy prompting, put into his father's office to undergo the process. He had made no especial mark while at school and he now shone still less at business. He had not yet formed any definite idea of being a writer, but the whole atmosphere of commerce was utterly distasteful to him, and he never at any time in his life attempted to assume an interest in things which he did not feel. Nonchalance towards the processes of calico-printing on the part of a beginner was, naturally enough, very trying to his father, to whom a manner of business-like alertness was a matter of conscience rather than of temperament, and the relationship between father and son, never at any time a close or sympathetic one, began under the daily friction of office life to grow more strained and critical.

The vein of religious melancholy which Will Davies, the father, had inherited from his Welsh ancestors was, under stress of accumulating misfortune, developing into a state of morbid spiritual nervousness, which reacted upon his family in innumerable little acts of interference and discipline. While his children were in the stage of unthinking infancy his carefulness and kindness towards them had been never-failing, but as they grew to years of reason and began to form opinions of their own he failed to understand them or sympathise with them, and where he could not understand he knew no other way than to coerce and forbid. What this constant criticism and repression must have cost to a generous, sensitive temperament like Hubert's it is impossible to estimate. It was the clash of two diametrically opposed systems and temperaments ; and both father and son suffered

painfully from its effects. But though, as always in such cases, it was the younger and more ardent who received the deepest hurt, in later life Hubert had come to the belief that no man can fairly be blamed for having a narrow mind any more than for having a narrow chest, and after he had achieved his full liberation it is certain that all the personal bitterness had died out of his early memories.

Both at home and in the office these years were for Hubert full of deep difficulty and depression; his relations with his mother and his brother and his sisters were, however, so happy and intimate that they lightened all this period, and it is unquestionably true that it was just the stern experiences of this time that taught him concentration and self-discipline.

It was when he was about twenty that he first formed the determination to be a dramatist, and thenceforward nothing ever shook his conviction that he was going to be a successful one. The first time that he had ever been inside a theatre was one summer when at the age of fourteen he had gone from Wilmslow to visit some elderly relatives in London. He stayed in Camden Square and was taken to the Adelphi Theatre to see *The Streets of London*, and the performance in that play of Miss Clara Jecks in the part of the Cockney boy Dan filled him with the keenest delight. But this was in London, and when later on at home in Manchester he went to the play there were great heart-burnings about it. His father's habitual attitude towards even the most innocent forms of amusement had then become one of pained and solemn disapproval, and it will readily be understood, therefore, that the theatre called forth his severest reprobation. There were many painful scenes between them about it, conducted in a sombre tragedy strain; and when on the occasion of one of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry's rare visits to Manchester Hubert persisted, in spite of the parental displeasure, in going to see them in *The Merchant of Venice* all Will's Welsh ancestry rose up indignantly within him and he threatened his son with expulsion from the home.

Nevertheless, Hubert now never for a moment desisted from his ambition, and summer or winter, week-day or Sunday, it was only at the end of the evening, after the

usual good-nights had been said, that, mounting the creaking little stair to the top of the house, he began the real work of the day. Whether the evening had been spent at home or away, whether he went upstairs early or late, scarcely an evening passed at that time that he did not sit for hours at an old dressing-table in the attic, surrounded by the family's dusty travelling trunks, writing pieces long and short, tragic and comic, while the family slept below and the street outside grew silent and empty. Side by side with his writing he had now also become a close student of modern play construction, both French and English. He was probably in those days more influenced by the construction of Pinero than by that of any other English dramatist, and among contemporary French writers, by the work of Scribe and Sardou. He read widely the plays of the period, Ibsen, Wilde, Sudermann, Maeterlinek, all had their turn. Also the older English writers—Goldsmith and Sheridan, the dramatists of the Restoration, and the Elizabethans both great and small.

Doubtless those early efforts were no less artificial and derived than the experimental work of most young writers. His MSS. when completed came back to him with painful regularity from the actors and managers to whom they had been sent ; but though disappointments were many and bitter, and though he had not a single friend at hand to advise him as to the best method of pursuing his end, he never for an instant lost the belief that he would one day succeed, and when a note of praise and encouragement came one day from Mrs. Kendal, he walked to business on air for a week afterwards even though she had at the same time returned his MS. He nevertheless perceived that he was now in a back-water, that the years were passing swiftly by and that he was achieving nothing. He had an uncle who in early life had gone forth to seek his fortune in the New World and had prospered exceedingly, not only in the group of islands in the Pacific, where he had his headquarters, but also on the mainland of America. To this uncle now living in England Hubert, in the summer of 1893, went for advice ; the uncle was practical and encouraging, and by his generosity it was arranged there and then that Hubert should go out to America in the following

September with a sufficient sum of money in his pocket to live on for three months, thus giving him time to look round for employment. If at the end of that time he had been unsuccessful in making any connections for himself, his uncle undertook to find him a post in San Francisco in a large shipping office there allied to his own firm. On the 16th September 1893 he sailed from Liverpool in the s.s. *Campania* in company with his uncle and two cousins.

I will pass swiftly over his American experiences. He stayed for the rest of that year in Chicago and sought everywhere for a situation, tried to get work on various papers, made many efforts and many false hopes and starts but no success. In April of the next year he reached San Francisco and at once began work in the office of Messrs. Williams Dimond, shippers. In May of 1898 he had his first play produced, a one-act piece entitled *A Dream of Love*, part dialogue, part pantomime; it was written for and acted by Madame Pilar-Morin, a French pantomimist, and was produced by her at the Orpheum, San Francisco. He had good press notices but no striking success with the public. It was just at this time that his Uncle Theo Davies died and he left Hubert £1000, which, while not immediately altering his plans, gave him the all-important breathing-space for play-writing. During the next few months he stayed on in San Francisco at the office, continually writing and occasionally contributing short stories, poems, and articles to various San Francisco papers, "The Lotus," "Philistine," etc. Then in October 1897 he was appointed musical and dramatic critic to the *News Letter*, a San Francisco weekly, and on the last day of that year he left the office for ever to devote himself entirely to journalism and literature.

In March of 1899 he received an offer from Daniel Frohman to produce *The Weldons*, a drama in four acts which Hubert had completed in the previous autumn, for a single performance at the Empire Theatre, New York. This decided Hubert to leave San Francisco at once for New York. He attended the last week's rehearsals, and the public performance on April 6 had a good reception and encouraging notices but was never afterwards revived. He then paid a short visit to

England, returned to America in September, settling this time in New York, where he stayed two years. His history henceforward is the history of his plays.

In March of 1900 a one-act piece, *Fifty Years Ago*, was successfully produced by Miss Lilian Burkhart. She opened at Omaha and toured the States with it. The rest of the year he was hard at work, chiefly on a play that Daniel Frohman had asked him to write. This was *Cynthia*, which, however, did not satisfy Frohman. He spent the earlier part of 1901 in New York writing notably *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace*. Then he left America for good and spent the summer with his family in Shropshire, where he wrote most of *Cousin Kate*. Then in the autumn he came to London and settled in the Royal Avenue, Chelsea. 1902 was his fateful year. In the spring *Cousin Kate* was submitted to Frederick Harrison and Cyril Maude. They accepted it immediately as it stood and made a contract to produce it within twelve months. In October he read *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace* to Charles Wyndham and Mary Moore. They closed with it at once, made a contract, and promised to produce it as early in the following year as possible.

Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace had its first production May 12, 1903, and it was at once an immense success. This was followed in the same year by the appearance on June 18 of *Cousin Kate*, another most successful play. The dates of the production of his other plays were as follows :

<i>Cynthia</i>	May 16, 1904 (produced in New York, March 16, 1903).
<i>Captain Drew on Leave</i>	October 24, 1905.
<i>The Mollusc</i>	October 15, 1907.
<i>Lady Epping's Lawsuit</i>	October 12, 1908.
<i>Bevis</i>	April 1, 1909.
<i>A Single Man</i> : . . .	November 8, 1910.
<i>Doormats</i>	October 3, 1912.
<i>Outcast</i>	September 1914.

After the production of *Outcast* he went to France and did notable work in the hospitals of Paris and elsewhere. In the following year, however, he had a bad nervous breakdown, and after a long and trying illness

he died, as truly a willing victim in the cause of his country as any soldier in France, on August 17, 1917.

II

Such are the bare facts of Davies's life. When one comes to an attempt at estimating his character and personality, one is faced with a real difficulty. Of all the notable figures in that pre-war London, now so rapidly becoming traditional and even romantic, Davies was the very last to wear his heart on his sleeve. On the very first five minutes of that now famous première of *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace* a certain attitude was forced upon Davies from the outside. He was the recognised jester of that pre-war London world ; there is nothing that human nature likes better than the emphasising of little foibles, weaknesses, and oddities by some observer who has not too acid or malicious a touch. Best of all is the satirist of human society who at the same time satirises himself. With him we feel absolutely safe, and although he may laugh at us, we are secure from treachery because he is target with ourselves.

It was just this position that Davies occupied. Those early years of stern discipline and dreary surroundings had trained him to snatch fun wherever he found it. He could see nothing, hear nothing, share in nothing without finding something that made life more entertaining, more whimsical, more delicately absurd than it had been before, and so delighted was he with his little discoveries that he must share them with his friends, and those friends, finding that to them also life was suddenly more entertaining and whimsical, delighted in his company, demanded that he should be for ever at his best, and in many cases refused to see him in any other rôle but the one that he so beautifully filled. Again and again, watching him, I used to wonder that he could so buoyantly keep it up. I used to wonder still more that he could find certain people, who seemed to all the rest of the world tiresome and heavy, such excellent company. His wit was quick, clean, darting, always sure of its aim, always knowing when to stop, always kindly and, best of all, original. The pageant of London entertained him

uneasiness, and although he loved Italy and enjoyed his visits to America, it was London that was his real hunting ground. He was able to say the obvious things about people and places without ever being obvious at all, giving his point of view a sudden little twist which made it entirely his own, a point of view generally a little kinder than the others, and always a little neater. He showed that characteristic so frequently seen in those who have had dull and restricted childhoods, of a perpetual pleasure in the tiniest adventures that life brought to him. It was not that he marvelled at his own success, because, as I have already said, he had from the very beginning determined to succeed, but the things that success brought to him were always twice as delightful as he had expected them to be. People were more amusing, places more beautiful, books and pictures and travel more entrancing, the London bustle more entertaining than he had ever dreamt that he would find them, and one of the things that made his company so perpetually refreshing was the sensation that one had with him that to-day was the first day and the last day, there had never been any day like it before, that there would never be any day like it again, and that therefore one must live every moment of it. He had the actual consciousness of his happiness at the instant that he was experiencing it, and that is perhaps one of the rarest gifts given to human beings. Behind his fun and happiness one always had the sense of the artist at work. Not that he was deliberately using everything that came to him as material for future plays, but rather that he took the things—a little dinner party, a first night, a ride on an omnibus, luncheon at the Garrick Club, an interview in the middle of Piccadilly with an old gentleman who had just lost his dog and was very unhappy about it, a visit to Madame Tussaud's, a ride in a taxi on a summer's evening out to Harrow—whatever it might be—and made them little rounded episodes coloured and decorated with his fantasy and humour, and then left them there for you to enjoy so that they remain for ever afterwards as something distinct and framed, hanging upon the wall of your mind so long as your house should endure.

His brother describes him when he was eight years old as "a chubby, pink-faced child, with bright yellow

hair, his busy figure a familiar object in the country, playing rounders in the hayfield, catching frogs in the pond, bustling in and out of the stables and shippings of the neighbouring farm in order to investigate the mystery of the birth of calves and foals and the death of pigs, a cheerful, laughter-loving creature though somewhat easily moved to scorn and disrespect of elders." That description might remain almost true of him to the very outbreak of the war. He stayed incredibly young, and I have often seen on his face exactly that look of an inquiring child in whose mind some small roguery is plotting, an expression humorous, a little malicious, entirely engaging, breaking into laughter at the earliest possible moment. It was in this particular character that he was known to most of his contemporaries. Where Davies was there would be sure to be fun, games different from any other games, points of view that never did any harm and made the heaviest bore entertaining. It was natural that he should be wanted everywhere and superficially he seemed to give himself up to that life of amusement and light-hearted laughter. His own family and one or two of his most intimate friends knew that underneath there was quite another Hubert Henry. He was himself desperately shy of his deeper side. This shyness came, I used to think, from an innate modesty and his vision of himself as some one of a small, cheerful talent who had no right to bother the rest of the world with his real feelings about life. He approached his friends with an attitude of easy comradeship and light-hearted fun, and it was not until they had enjoyed his friendship for some time that they realised his unswerving loyalty, his immediate unselfishness if they made any demands upon him, his extraordinary wisdom and common sense when they were in trouble. They never made any appeal to him that he refused. He never forgot an obligation that he owed. When he chose to speak seriously of literature and art and music, you were surprised to discover how quietly and without any self-intrusion he had been working and developing his own line of study as consistently as though he had no social existence at all.

After the success of his earlier comedies, he was determined to prove to the world his ability to write

plays of a much more serious kind, and in the first half of *Outcast* he undoubtedly did this. Had the war not smashed in upon the world, we would have seen, I am convinced, quite a new development in his art, but the war did come and it killed him. His attitude of fun and humorous observation of life had never hidden from his friends his deep tenderness of heart. He simply could not bear that people should suffer and be unhappy. Until the war he had the sense that human beings on the whole got enough out of life to make it worth while for them, and although there was unhappiness and misery there was sufficient love and laughter and beauty to make the world go round. During the early months of the war, when he was doing his hospital work in France, he still felt the impulse of courage and unselfishness that those first weeks of August 1914 brought so magnificently forward. Then as the months went on, as the war so hopelessly lengthened, as he saw in those same hospitals the pain and the agony, the frustrated hopes, and the lingering deaths, he began to feel, I think, that the whole of his earlier estimate of life was wrong and that the world was a hideous place into which he had been somehow tricked in believing. He was now forty-five years of age and it all must suddenly have seemed to him too vast and terrible for any one to deal with. He violently overworked his strength, broke down in health, came home, and then for two years struggled to secure again some of his earlier vitality and confidence ; but his heart was too tender, his imagination too keen. I remember in the second or third year of the war, when I was home on leave, paying him a visit in Oxford. He had just read a book of mine that had for its background the Russian Front in Galicia. I remember how he spoke with a sort of feverish urgency as though he wanted to drive everybody together to stop the horrible massacre at the earliest possible moment, and then suddenly, with a little broken gesture, cried, "And here am I in Oxford doing nothing to help to stop it. Nothing at all." The war overwhelmed him so dreadfully that he could not think of his plays, he could get no theme that did not seem to him unspeakably trivial, he despised himself and his art and his earlier view of life with a contempt that those things never for a moment deserved and that

had been fed by the working of his imagination ceaselessly upon the miseries and tragedies of the war. He did literally die of a broken heart. He loved his fellow-beings too deeply to endure the thought of their great unhappiness, and he was too immediately conscious of their suffering to look forward to the day when the world would recover from its sickness and men be brothers once again.

To so many of us looking back he will always stand out as the happiest, freest, kindest, and warmest-hearted of all the figures in that pre-war London. Nobody since has seemed to have quite that mixture of childlike simplicity, wise common sense, burning generosity, and unfaltering loyalty. He remains a whimsical, laughing knight-errant, and there is no one like him any more.

III

Any consideration of the plays of Hubert Henry Davies must lead at least to one inevitable conclusion about them and that is their timelessness. There is perhaps no form of art that dates quite so decisively as the play of social manners, and it is only when, as in *The Way of the World* and *The School for Scandal*, the motives of the human beings concerned are universal and not of a period that the play has any chance of survival with a fresh generation. Davies had this at least in common with Sheridan, that every one of his plays contains one or two scenes built on the pathos and humour of characteristics that are eternally in human nature, and it is because of these little scenes that his work will live. When one considers them—the losing of Mrs. Gorrингe's necklace, “the tea à deux” in *Cousin Kate*, the little meal with the typist in *A Single Man*, the breakfast scene in *Doormats*, the knitting scene in *Captain Drew*, and every scene from first to last in *The Mollusc*—these are the things that bring Davies into the true line of English writers of comedy in full and rightful succession to Wycherley, Congreve, Sheridan, and Wilde. These scenes are often, let it at once be confessed, placed in a setting unworthy of them. A dramatist who sees human nature as human nature is and wishes to put upon the boards truthfully what he sees has a difficulty of construction and development

that a writer who is thinking first and foremost of the stage and the stage world cannot feel. In our own time we have seen two schools of the drama abruptly diverge. We have allowed our realists, St. John Ervine, Lennox Robinson, and others, to give us real life as they see it, however slender the theme upon which they hang their pictures. Many of our other dramatists have quite frankly sacrificed human nature to dramatic effect, and we have understood from the beginning of their plays that they are going to do this and have accepted their convention. It is a noteworthy illustration of this that the one play of John Galsworthy that has been a real popular success departs further from real human nature than any other that he has written.

Davies in those years before the war must have felt that difficulty less sharply than the dramatists of to-day. Bernard Shaw and Hankin were almost alone at that time in their determination to write of life as they saw it, and to sacrifice all the dramatic conventions at once if by doing so they could tell the truth. In Davies's very first success, *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace*, this struggle between real life and the life of the theatre was apparent. Listen to Mrs. Gorringe, who has just lost her necklace and is explaining to a detective how she lost it.

JERNIGAN. And now how did you come to discover the diamonds were missing?

MRS. GORRINGE. Well, I went up to my room when I came in from the polo match, and suppose the dressing-table to be there—(points to VICKY) where Miss Jardine is. And the door where this one is. (Points to the door.) I came in at the door something like this. (Goes to the door, opens it, goes just outside and comes in again.) I closed the door. (Closes the door and goes towards VICKY as she says.) Then I crossed over to the dressing-table in quite an ordinary manner, just as I am doing now. (When she has nearly arrived at VICKY she stops suddenly.) Oh, no. I've made a mistake. The dressing-table, of course, would be there. (Points towards MRS. JARDINE.) I was thinking of the one at home. (She pauses a moment undecided, then says.) I must come in again. (She then runs to the door, opens it, goes just outside, closes it, opens it again and puts her head just inside to say.) Now you are to suppose I didn't come in before. (Takes her head back and closes the door.)

MRS. JARDINE (*scarcely able to restrain her impatience*). I shall scream in a minute.

MRS. GORRINGE. I crossed over to the dressing-table—which, of course, is here now. (*Points to a spot near MRS. JARDINE, walks towards it, and stands still.*) I opened my jewel-ease. I don't know what made me do that then. I suppose I must have had a presentiment. Oh, no. It was to get these rings. (*Bends up her hand to show her rings.*) I thought it looked different somehow, and what was it I said to myself? (*Frowns as she thinks a moment.*) Oh, yes. I remember saying to myself, "Well, that's funny!" Then all at once it came across me like a flash of lightning, and I clasped my hands and exclaimed (*clasps her hands dramatically*), "Great Heavens, my diamond necklace has gone!" (*Drops her dramatic pose and tone.*) Just like that.

Contrast with that the following scene in the same play when the young villain of the piece confesses to the noble elderly friend that he has committed the theft.

DAVID. I know I'm unworthy of her, but—I'm not all bad.

MOWBRAY. I know that. I don't ask you to be perfect. We all have our faults. But it isn't the number of his sins that mark a man—it's the kind.

DAVID (*humbly*). Don't you think—with this experience—I can be different?

MOWBRAY. The curse of degeneracy is always there, in your mind and in your heart. It's like a taint in the blood. It warps your judgement, poisons your impulses, lures you into constant danger.

DAVID. But with Isabel to help me—

MOWBRAY. To help *you*—she—to give up *her* life to *you* will bring her only shame and sorrow—to expose *her* sweet nature day after day to *your* contamination—to make her the mother of *your* children. No, it's not to be thought of—you must not marry her.

DAVID. I can't give her up.

MOWBRAY. Then she must know the truth. If you don't break your engagement before you leave this house I shall tell her that—

ISABEL (*calls outside*). David!

Is not the one quotation as true to real life as the other is true to the life of the theatre? He was never again to blend so crudely the two elements as he did in

Mrs. Gorringe, but he found it always, I think, exceedingly difficult to find a fable which would be interesting enough dramatically without driving him from the work that he really loved. Once in *The Mollusc* he was entirely successful, and in *Cousin Kate* he almost succeeded, but he gravely endangered what is to myself his very best play, *Captain Drew on Leave*, by the old theatrical scene of the woman going to the man's rooms at night, there to be discovered by man No. 2, and in his less successful plays, *Bevis*, *A Single Man*, and the last two acts of *Outcast* his sense of reality frequently deserted him. There remain, however, four plays, *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace*, *Cousin Kate*, *The Mollusc*, and *Captain Drew on Leave*, that contain so much of the real Davies that they must surely endure in the line of great English comedy so long as the English stage endures at all. The best scenes in these plays, the second act of *Cousin Kate*, the whole of *The Mollusc*, the second act of *Mrs. Gorringe*, and the second act of *Captain Drew*, remind us more definitely of the art of Jane Austen than of any other writer. That great lady would beyond any question have delighted in *Mrs. Gorringe*, in *Mrs. Baxter* and *Mr. Baxter* from *The Mollusc*, in *Cousin Kate*, first sister to *Elizabeth Bennet*, and in *Miss Mills*, the amorous spinster of *Captain Drew*. It is indeed astonishing to notice how little time has changed these types, how English these types are, and how admirably they are suited to the friendly, satirical spirit that belonged to the creator of *Mrs. Baxter* just as surely as to the chronicler of *Miss Bates*. And here one may notice a very remarkable characteristic of these Davies plays, that they more perhaps than any other plays in the English language do what good novels do—make us speculate on the lives of the characters in them before and after the action that we have been shown. Does any one in the world believe in the existence of *Paula Tanqueray* or of *Mrs. Dane* or of *Lady Windermere* after the fall of the curtain? St. John Hankin indeed created people who lived beyond the action of the play, but his touch was so much more bitter than Davies's that we do not feel any affection for his people; but *Cousin Kate*, *Mrs. Moxon* of *Captain Drew*, the little typist in *A Single Man*, the poor heroine of *Outcast*, are our friends

even as Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and David Copperfield are our friends. Davies himself loves them and as he develops them he has that sense of discovery about them that belongs always to the true creative artist. Without making any odious comparison, this can be seen very clearly when one compares *The Mollusc* with a play like *The Tyranny of Tears* by the late Mr. Haddon Chambers, the theme of the two plays being almost identical. Clever though *The Tyranny of Tears* is, it is a play of the theatre and its characters are theatrical puppets. But Mrs. Baxter goes gloriously on, far into time, triumphantly conscious that she will get her way so long as there is a man in the world, a way that no votes for women can affect so long as human nature remains unchanged.

It is interesting to speculate on the probable development of Davies's work had he lived. He was tending, as I have already said, towards more serious themes and a deeper presentation of life. The first act of *Outcast* shows that he was justified of his ambition, but artists are given only one of two things to do supremely well, and although I believe that he would have seen more and more clearly the way to blend plot with character and comedy with drama, we have definitely here in these two volumes the real essence of his art. One wonders sometimes when one goes to the theatre of to-day and sees so many plays false to life, lacking in all the true genius of the theatre, how long it will be before *Cousin Kate*, *The Mollusc*, and *Captain Drew* will delight us once again. That they will be delighting theatre-goers of a hundred years from now is my own implicit belief.

HUGH WALPOLE.

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MRS. GORRINGE'S NECKLACE

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

COPY OF "FIRST NIGHT" PROGRAMME
AT
WYNDHAM'S THEATRE, LONDON

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 1903, AND EVERY EVENING, AT 8.45

Will be presented a New and Original Play in Four Acts,
Entitled,

MRS. GORRINGE'S NECKLACE,

BY

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

<i>Captain Mowbray (Retired)</i>	.	.	CHARLES WYNDHAM
<i>Colonel Jardine (Retired)</i>	.	.	MR. ALFRED BISHOP
<i>Lieutenant David Cairn</i>	.	.	MR. LESLIE FABER
<i>Mr. Jernigan (a Detective-Inspector)</i>			MR. EILLE NORWOOD
<i>Charles (a Footman)</i>	.	.	MR. REGINALD WALTER
<i>Mrs. Jardine</i>	.	.	MISS MARIE ILLINGTON
<i>Isabel Kirke</i>	<i>(her Daughters)</i>	.	MISS MABEL TERRY-Lewis
<i>Vicky Jardine</i>		.	MISS LETTICE FAIRFAX
<i>Miss Potts</i>	.	.	MISS ETHEL MARRYAT
AND			
<i>Mrs. Gorringe</i>	.	.	MISS MARY MOORE

The scene of the Play is laid in the Library in Colonel Jardine's House

The action takes place near a Garrison Town at a little distance from London and covers a period of about twenty hours

MRS. GORRINGE'S NECKLACE

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE.—*The library of COLONEL JARDINE's house, situated near a garrison town in the south of England. The library is much used by all the family as a sitting-room. Opposite the audience there is a French window affording a view of a large well-kept garden. On one side of the stage there is a fireplace, and in the wall opposite, a door. There is an electric bell beside the fireplace and a switch for turning on the electric light beside the door. The room is well furnished with bookshelves, a large writing-table, two or three smaller tables, a sofa, chairs, etc., etc., presenting a comfortable and homelike appearance.*

Near the fireplace, and in full view of the whole audience, there is an ornamental bowl, standing on a high pedestal and containing a flowering plant. It is the late afternoon of a summer day.

MRS. JARDINE, a well-dressed, middle-aged woman, is lying asleep on the sofa.

Enter MRS. GORRINGE, a younger woman, always elaborately but never vulgarly dressed. She wears a handsome house dress and no hat. She appears restless and preoccupied all through her scene with MRS. JARDINE. When MRS. GORRINGE closes the door, MRS. JARDINE wakes with a start, blinks and looks up without taking her feet down.

MRS. JARDINE. Oh! Is that you, Mrs. Gorringe?

MRS. GORRINGE. I hope I haven't disturbed you.

MRS. JARDINE. No. It must be about my waking-up time.

MRS. GORRINGE. It's after five.

MRS. JARDINE. Then they'll be home soon. I thought you had all gone to watch the polo.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes, but I left the ground early. (*Sits and gazes at the fireplace*).

MRS. JARDINE. How was the game going ?

MRS. GORRINGE. I don't know. As soon as any one explains to me how the score stands, they always go and change the board.

MRS. JARDINE. Was any one hurt ?

MRS. GORRINGE. No.

MRS. JARDINE. That's a mercy. Every time they play, I have visions of my husband being borne home mangled on a shutter. I was so wrought up over the idea this afternoon, it took me several minutes to drop asleep.

MRS. GORRINGE. Colonel Jardine was umpiring to-day.

MRS. JARDINE. Oh, yes. Who played for our side ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Captain Mowbray, and Mr. What's-his-name, and that Mr. Thingamy with the white eyelashes and some one else—I forget who.

MRS. JARDINE. Sounds like a very strong team. I suppose Captain Mowbray carried all before him as usual.

MRS. GORRINGE (*gazing at the fireplace, and not attending*). Yes.

MRS. JARDINE. I'm glad Isabel was there to see his triumph. I really believe he's been in love with her ever since he first met her, when he came home a few years ago. And now that he has made this enormous fortune in South Africa, I see no obstacle to a marriage. There used to be some goings-on between Isabel and David Cairn, but I hope that's all blown over. He has no money, you see, so of course it's no good— (*looks towards MRS. GORRINGE and sees she is not attending*). I'm afraid I bore you.

MRS. GORRINGE (*starts and turns to her*). Oh, no, indeed—you talk so interestingly about polo.

MRS. JARDINE (*surprised*). Polo ? What's the matter, dear ; aren't you well ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*nervously*). I'm a little upset. In fact—very much upset. I've lost something.

MRS. JARDINE. Oh ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes—a—a—diamond necklace.

MRS. JARDINE (*in consternation*). A diamond necklace!

MRS. GORRINGE. With a pearl clasp.

MRS. JARDINE. But how— How could it have happened?

MRS. GORRINGE (*rises*). I don't know. I can't think. (*Speaks volubly as she moves about describing the scene.*) I went to my room when I came in. You know how the dressing-table stands—as if it were there. (*Points to a table.*) And the door of course is like this. (*Indicates the door, goes towards it, opens it, goes just outside and then comes in again.*) Well, I came in at the door just as I'm coming in now. Of course I had my hat on. I closed the door. (*Closes the door and walks towards the imaginary dressing-table, talking all the time.*) Then I crossed over to the dressing-table in quite an ordinary manner. Just as I'm doing now. (*Stands before the imaginary dressing-table.*) Well, I looked into my jewel-case. I wanted to get some rings. These rings, in fact. (*Bends her hand to show her rings.*) I thought it looked different from usual. I couldn't think what it was at first, but I remember saying to myself, "Well, that's funny!" Then all at once it flashed across me and I clasped my hands and exclaimed (*clasps her hands dramatically*), "Great heavens, my diamond necklace has gone!" (*Drops the dramatic pose and tone.*) Just like that.

MRS. JARDINE. What a terrible situation for me. To think it should be lost in *my* house.

MRS. GORRINGE. *My* necklace.

MRS. JARDINE. It must be one of the servants. We haven't had Pipkin long, and she's always looking out of the window. I shouldn't wonder if *she* stole it. (*MRS. JARDINE'S attention is attracted to the window as ISABEL, VICKY and MISS POTTS pass without, dressed in their outdoor clothes. ISABEL is a handsome, independent girl of twenty-five; VICKY a giddy creature of fifteen with a plait coming undone; MISS POTTS an unimportant spinster.*) Here are the girls. Don't say a word about it.

MRS. GORRINGE. No. It's better not. I told my maid to stay in my room and guard the rest of my jewels. (*Sits, gazing in front of her, and sighs.*)

(ISABEL enters, followed by VICKY and MISS POTTS.)

ISABEL (*coming forward as she speaks*). We've brought Miss Potts to tea. (*Rings the bell beside the fireplace*.)

MRS. JARDINE (*shaking hands with MISS POTTS*). Did you enjoy the polo?

MISS POTTS. Oh, exceedingly.

ISABEL. We won. Four to three.

MRS. JARDINE. Hurrah!

(MRS. JARDINE and MISS POTTS *sit on the sofa conversing together*.)

VICKY. And we had such fun coming home. We all squashed into the cart and sat on each other's laps.

MRS. JARDINE (*remonstrating*). Oh, Vicky, dear.

VICKY. Not Isabel. (*With meaning*.) David wasn't there.

ISABEL. Vicky, don't you think you'd better go and do your hair? It looks as if you'd been sweeping the field with it.

VICKY. Will you do it, Mrs. Gorringe?

(*Produces a ribbon from her pocket and gives it to MRS. GORRINGE as she speaks*.)

MRS. GORRINGE *starts from a reverie when addressed*. VICKY *kneels beside MRS. GORRINGE'S chair while she plaits her hair and whispers to her*.)

MISS POTTS and VICKY (*together*). Oh! Lor!

(*They both turn to ISABEL*.)

MISS POTTS and VICKY (*together*). Isabel, Mrs. Gorringe has lost her diamond necklace.

MRS. JARDINE, MRS. GORRINGE and ISABEL (*sharply together*). Sh!

(*They say "Sh!" because CHARLES, a young footman, enters with a tea-tray. As they say "Sh!" MRS. JARDINE seizes MISS POTTS so suddenly by the arm that she utters a little scream, while MRS. GORRINGE pulls VICKY back by her plait. They remain silent, watching CHARLES as he arranges the tea-table. As soon as CHARLES goes out they all begin talking at once until CHARLES returns with a teapot, which he places upon the table. There is dead silence from the moment CHARLES enters until he goes out again, closing the door after him. Then ISABEL speaks*.)

ISABEL. Your diamond necklace ?

MRS. GORRINGE. With the pearl clasp.

ISABEL. How very dreadful.

MRS. JARDINE. We aren't saying anything about it at present.

ISABEL. How very silly.

MRS. GORRINGE. Is it ? I don't know what we really ought to do ; you see, I never lost anything of any value before I came to stay with *you*.

MRS. JARDINE. And we never lost anything at all before *you* came to stay with us.

MRS. GORRINGE. If Pipkin really stole it——

ISABEL (*interrupting* MRS. GORRINGE). Who says Pipkin stole it ?

(MRS. GORRINGE *looks at* MRS. JARDINE.)

MRS. JARDINE. I only said she *might* have done. You know she *is* always looking out of the windows, and she lived with a French family before she came to us.

VICKY (*giggling*). Oh, isn't that just like mother ?

ISABEL (*pausing as she makes the tea to say thoughtfully*). That's rather queer. (*They look towards ISABEL*.) Do you remember that story Captain Mowbray told at luncheon yesterday about a man who stole a woman's bracelet and had it copied in paste ?

VICKY. Oh, yes, and she never knew the difference.

MRS. JARDINE. He lived on the bracelet for years.

MISS POTTS. The villain !

VICKY. And she'd never have found out, only he confessed on his death-bed.

MISS POTTS. How very singular.

ISABEL. Whenever he wanted money he took a diamond from the setting and sold it.

VICKY. How he must have hurt his nails.

MRS. JARDINE. Don't be silly.

MRS. GORRINGE (*plaintively*). But what's all that got to do with my necklace ?

ISABEL. One can't help recalling it now because, you know, you said you hoped nothing like that would happen to *you*, and that you always leave your jewel-eases lying about on your dressing-table.

MRS. JARDINE. Yes, I remember thinking at the time how foolish it was of Mrs. Gorringe to say that.

MRS. GORRINGE. I thought I was quite safe to say it here. Let me see. Who was at luncheon yesterday?

ISABEL. We were all there.

MISS POTTS (*emphatically*). I wasn't. I assure you this is all news to me.

VICKY (*giggling*). Poor Potty, she thinks we suspect her.

ISABEL (*seriously to VICKY*). This isn't a joke.

MRS. GORRINGE. No.

ISABEL. I mean all the family and the people staying here, Mrs. Gorringe, Captain Mowbray and David.

MRS. JARDINE (*with sudden excitement*). And Pipkin was waiting at table.

ISABEL. No, mother, Charles was.

MRS. JARDINE. The same thing. He's probably in love with her—she has quite a tolerable figure. And I bet you anything you like he went straight from the table and told her.

ISABEL. You've no right to accuse the servants in that general way.

MRS. JARDINE. Well—what else would you do?

ISABEL. Send for a detective.

MRS. GORRINGE. Of course. (*Rising and going eagerly towards ISABEL*.) And I'll run down to the Post Office and give them a description of my necklace.

ISABEL. Why the Post Office?

MRS. GORRINGE. I thought that was the kind of place one would go to in a case of this sort.

(COLONEL JARDINE *is heard talking and laughing boisterously without*.)

COLONEL JARDINE. By Jove, Mowbray, I never saw you in better form. Ha—Ha—Ha—!

MRS. JARDINE. Your father! All sit down and pretend nothing has happened.

(*They all sit down with the exception of MRS. GORRINGE*.)

MRS. GORRINGE. If we pretend nothing has happened I shall never get my necklace back.

MRS. JARDINE. Hush!

(*MRS. GORRINGE sits down reluctantly*.)

MISS POTTS. I think I should tell Colonel Jardine.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes.

MRS. JARDINE. Not till after dinner. That's the

best time to tell him things. His temper's so uncertain.

(COLONEL JARDINE *is again heard laughing without.*)

VICKY. He sounds in a good temper now.

MRS. JARDINE. His good tempers are more trying to put up with than his bad ones.

COLONEL JARDINE (*without, laughing boisterously as he speaks.*). By Jove, yes! Hottest finish I ever saw.

(COLONEL JARDINE *enters explosively. He is a rubicund, excitable, middle-aged man. He wears plain riding clothes. When he speaks, MRS. JARDINE lays her eep on her lap, closes her eyes and contracts her face as if in intense suffering.*)

COLONEL JARDINE (*rubbing his hands together*). Well, well, well. We beat 'em—four to three. Close score, eh, girls? (*Claps his hands together and laughs, pokes MRS. JARDINE in the back.*) D'you hear that, mother—four to three?

MRS. JARDINE (*bows her head, her eyes still closed as if suffering.*). I hear.

COLONEL JARDINE (*shaking hands with MISS POTTS*). How d'you do, Miss Potts? You saw the game. As I was just saying to Mowbray, "Hottest finish I ever saw."

MRS. JARDINE (*as before*). We heard you.

COLONEL JARDINE. Mowbray saved the day. We put him on the last minute, when David didn't turn up. Shot three goals himself. I believe he would have shot another, but just then the bell went (*imitating gong*), "Wang-wang-wang-wang-wang!"

MRS. JARDINE (*putting her fingers in her ears, exclaims loudly*). Christopher! Please confine yourself to speech and laughter.

ISABEL. Tea, father?

COLONEL JARDINE. Tea, tea, tea? Yes. Give us some tea. (*Turning to the tea-table, he faces MRS. GORRINGE.*) Why, Mrs. Gorringe, what's the matter? You look as doleful as I don't know what.

MRS. GORRINGE. So would you. (*To ISABEL.*) I'll go and put on my hat and wait for you in the hall.

ISABEL. All right.

MRS. JARDINE (*to MRS. GORRINGE, as she goes towards*

the door). Are you going to send the h'm h'm about the h'm h'm ?

MRS. GORRINGE. If'm h'm.

COLONEL JARDINE. What's h'm h'm and h'm h'm ?

MRS. JARDINE. Something you don't know about. Don't tell him, girls.

COLONEL JARDINE. I insist on knowing. I won't have this talking in hieroglyphics before me.

ISABEL. He'll have to be told soon.

COLONEL JARDINE. Told, told what ?

MRS. JARDINE, MISS POTTS, ISABEL and VICKY (*together*). Mrs. Gorringe has lost her diamond necklace.

MRS. GORRINGE (*speaking with the others*). I've lost my diamond necklace.

COLONEL JARDINE (*unable to hear a word*). What ! Don't all shout at me like that.

MRS. GORRINGE. My diamond necklace—

COLONEL JARDINE. Well—well. What about it ?

MRS. GORRINGE. It's lost.

COLONEL JARDINE (*excitedly*). The devil it is. By Jove ! Something must be done.

ISABEL (*comes to COLONEL JARDINE, lays her hand on his arm and says quietly*). We are going to wire to Scotland Yard. (*To MRS. GORRINGE.*) We might write the telegram here.

(*Takes a sheet of paper from the paper-rack and a pencil from the pen-tray and lays them on the writing-table.* MRS. GORRINGE *sits down and writes.* MISS POTTS *rises and takes leave of MRS. JARDINE.*)

VICKY. Going, Potty ?

MRS. JARDINE (*sharply*). Vicky, don't be impertinent.

VICKY. I'll go with you.

ISABEL. Now, Vicky and everybody, please don't tell any one we are going to have a detective in the house. The servants aren't to know who he is.

MRS. JARDINE. Especially Pipkin.

VICKY. All right. Come on, Potty.

MRS. JARDINE. Vicky !

(*VICKY and MISS POTTS go out.*)

ISABEL. Is your telegram ready, Mrs. Gorringe ?

MRS. GORRINGE. How will this do ? (*Looks round at the others before she begins to read gravely, in a clear, high*

voice.) "Lost, a beautiful diamond necklace. Five large drops in front. One pearl clasp behind." (ISABEL goes into a fit of laughter and turns away. MRS. GORRINGE looks at her in surprise.) What's the matter with it?

COLONEL JARDINE (*fussily*). You don't need so many words. See. Let me cross some of them out. (*He signs to MRS. GORRINGE to get out of her chair and let him sit there. She rises and stands beside him, watching him as he hastily crosses out words.*) Say, "Lost, beautiful diamond necklace!" You don't need to say "a" beautiful diamond necklace. Never use the articles "a," "an" and "the" in a telegram. You don't even need "beautiful" or "diamond." (*Crossing out words.*) Just say, "Lost necklace."

MRS. GORRINGE. But they might think it was nothing but a string of imitation pearls, and that wouldn't be worth sending a detective for.

COLONEL JARDINE. Well, leave "diamond" in if you like. (*Puzzling over paper.*) What's the next? I can't read your writing.

MRS. GORRINGE (*bends over him*). "Five large drops in front."

COLONEL JARDINE. You can save three words there. Just say "Drops front" and (*pouncing on words with his pencil and crossing them out*) "Clasp behind."

MRS. JARDINE (*watching them with contempt from her chair*). If they know anything at all at Scotland Yard they'll know the clasp wouldn't be in front and the drops behind.

COLONEL JARDINE. Yes, that's true. We can save two more words. (*Crossing out words.*) Just say—"Drops—clasp."

MRS. JARDINE. That's not sense.

MRS. GORRINGE. No. That's what *I* think.

COLONEL JARDINE (*getting confused between them*). Well, just say "Drops front, clasp hind."

MRS. JARDINE (*snapping him up*). Hind! Hind isn't a word.

COLONEL JARDINE (*getting angry*). You're getting me so mixed up I don't know what I'm doing. (*Puzzles over the telegram.*)

MRS. JARDINE. Well, send them something they can understand. I'm sure **I** shouldn't know what to make

of it if I received a telegram that said "Drops front—clasp hind." I should suppose Front and Hind were two men, shouldn't you, Mrs. Gorringe?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes, I should.

COLONEL JARDINE (*angrily*). Oh, well, if you think you can do it better yourself. (*Rises, throws his pencil on the table, muttering as he goes towards the door.*) What's the good of trying to be business-like with a pack of women? (*COLONEL JARDINE goes out fuming.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*nearly crying as she looks at the ruins of her telegram*). Oh, isn't it too bad? And the thief may be bargaining with the pawnbroker at this very moment, and here's my telegram worse than not begun.

(ISABEL takes the pencil, turns the paper over, scribbles a few words and then gives the paper to MRS. GORRINGE.)

ISABEL. Let us go and send that.

MRS. GORRINGE (*reading the paper*). But you've said nothing about my necklace.

ISABEL. It's so unnecessary.

(CAPTAIN MOWBRAY enters. *He is a strong, self-reliant man, about forty-five, grizzled and tanned with hard out-door life.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*all smiles*). Oh. Here's Captain Mowbray.

MRS. JARDINE. Captain Mowbray! Isabel shall give you tea before she goes and sends the—(*to ISABEL*) you know what.

MOWBRAY (*smiling at ISABEL*). Yes, do stay and give me tea before you go and send the—you know what, I don't.

ISABEL (*regretfully*). I'm sorry, but it's very urgent.

MOWBRAY. I'm sorry.

MRS. GORRINGE. But still, there is no need for us both to go, is there, Isabel?

ISABEL (*intending to stay, and offering the telegram to MRS. GORRINGE*). No.

MRS. GORRINGE (*sweetly, to MOWBRAY*). So I'll stay and give you your tea.

(*Seats herself at the tea-table and begins to make CAPTAIN MOWBRAY'S tea. ISABEL looks annoyed a moment, then goes out with the telegram.*)

MRS. GORRINGE. I feel so relieved now my telegram has nearly started.

MRS. JARDINE. You'd better be careful, Mrs. Gorringe, or you'll let the cat out of the bag.

(MRS. JARDINE goes out.)

MOWBRAY (*sitting at the tea-table with MRS. GORRINGE*). Have you got a secret, Mrs. Gorringe ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. Does that make me very interesting ?

MOWBRAY. Not unless you tell it.

MRS. GORRINGE (*pretending to be annoyed*). Oh. How ungallant you are.

MOWBRAY. To suggest you don't need a secret to make you interesting ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*smiling with pleasure at the compliment*). Now, Captain Mowbray, I believe you're making fun of me. It's very naughty of you. (*Giving him his tea*.) There ! (*Archly*.) You don't deserve it.

MOWBRAY. Aren't you going to give me something with it ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*smiles and drops her eyes*). How dare you !

MOWBRAY. I mean to eat.

MRS. GORRINGE (*slightly confused at her mistake*). Oh. (*Offers him cake and bread-and-butter with both hands*.) Cake or bread-and-butter ?

MOWBRAY. Cake, please. (*Puts out his hand to take a piece of cake*.)

MRS. GORRINGE (*playfully snatching the cake plate away and offering him only the bread-and-butter*). No, you must have bread-and-butter. Good little boys always begin their tea with a piece of bread-and-butter.

MOWBRAY (*taking bread-and-butter*). I'm so hungry, I'll take what I can get.

MRS. GORRINGE (*relenting, offers him the cake and says in baby language*). Poo' ickle sing. Then it s'all have its cake. (*Lays down the plates*.) Now, I'm not going to let you talk any more nonsense. (*Turns seriously to him*.) Tell me all about yourself.

MOWBRAY. All ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. Begin at the beginning.

MOWBRAY. Well—in the first place—I was born—shall we say—forty-two years ago ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh. Just Mr. Gorrингe's age. Go on.
MOWBRAY. Do you want the poor but honest parents?

MRS. GORRINGE (*coquettishly*). Now, you're making fun again. I shall get up and go out of the room if you aren't sensible. (*Seriously.*) I want to hear about your travels and experiences. It seems to me as if your life must have been quite a panorama of romances and adventures.

MOWBRAY. I suppose I have knocked about a good bit.

MRS. GORRINGE. I judged so from things I've heard you drop at meals.

MOWBRAY (*protesting humorously*). I never drop things at meals.

MRS. GORRINGE (*playfully threatening to slap him*). Oh, now, I mean remarks, silly.

MOWBRAY. Oh.

MRS. GORRINGE (*resting her cheek on her hand, and looking at him with serious interest*). You know, I could picture you in a storm at sea—standing dauntlessly on the poop—or single-handed cutting your way through an army of Dervishes with the colours, or rescuing a Spanish girl or—things of that sort.

MOWBRAY (*amused*). You'll make me feel quite a hero if you go on.

MRS. GORRINGE (*making eyes at him*). I think you are a hero.

MOWBRAY. Oh, dear no. I've always been a most ordinary person. I went into the Army because my father did. I left because it cost too much. I went to South Africa because I couldn't think of anywhere else to go. I made a fortune because I had good luck. You can't make a hero out of that.

MRS. GORRINGE. When the war broke out you offered to lay down your life for your country.

MOWBRAY. Oh, well—you see I happened to be on the spot and I knew the country and that sort of thing, so I wrote to the War Office and asked them if they wanted me.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. Well, now tell me about the women.

MOWBRAY (*surprised at her abrupt change*). What women?

MRS. GORRINGE. Which do you like the best—foreigners or us?

MOWBRAY. I like women individually—not geographically.

MRS. GORRINGE. Of course, but I never can see how an Englishman could bring himself to fall in love with a brown woman.

MOWBRAY. If we're talking of love—*(Pauses.)*

MRS. GORRINGE (*seizing her chance*). Now I suppose you are going to tell me *you* are in love.

MOWBRAY (*seriously*). Have you noticed it?

MRS. GORRINGE (*archly*). With some one you met in this house, no doubt.

MOWBRAY. You *have* noticed it.

MRS. GORRINGE (*smiling coyly*). Wretch.

MOWBRAY. Has *she*?

MRS. GORRINGE. Don't be absurd.

MOWBRAY. Do tell me.

MRS. GORRINGE. I shan't. (*Enter COLONEL and MRS. JARDINE. MRS. GORRINGE is visibly annoyed with this interruption and says under her breath.*) Bother!

MRS. JARDINE. Still here, Mrs. Gorringe? We are going to take a turn in the garden before we dress for dinner.

MRS. GORRINGE. That *will* be nice. (*Rises and goes to MRS. JARDINE.*) Captain Mowbray has been telling me such interesting stories—all about his life in South Africa.

MOWBRAY. Mrs. Gorringe was trying to make me out a hero, so I had to confess I'm really only an adventurer.

COLONEL JARDINE (*laughing*). Come, come, come! That's a pretty name to call yourself.

(COLONEL JARDINE and CAPTAIN MOWBRAY *converse together.*)

MRS. JARDINE (*glances at CAPTAIN MOWBRAY, then drops her voice to speak to MRS. GORRINGE*). Did he say anything about his passion?

MRS. GORRINGE (*coyly*). How did you guess?

MRS. JARDINE. From the way he looked at her when she went out.

MRS. GORRINGE (*puzzled*). Who?

MRS. JARDINE. Surely you noticed. He's over head and ears in love with Isabel.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, indeed. If you think that I'm afraid you'll find yourself very much mistaken.

[MRS. GORRINGE *goes out*.]

MOWBRAY (*calling off from the open window*). David ! We're in here !

(DAVID CAIRN *enters*. *He is a handsome young officer about twenty-seven. His demeanour is depressed, though he tries to conceal this under an off-hand manner.*)

COLONEL JARDINE (*fussily*). Oh, David, why didn't you turn up for polo ?

DAVID. I missed my train.

COLONEL JARDINE. You ought to have wired.

DAVID. Yes. I didn't think of it. And I knew (*indicating Mowbray*) Frank would play if I didn't turn up.

COLONEL JARDINE. That doesn't excuse you.

MOWBRAY (*good-naturedly*). Let him off this time, Colonel. I suppose he has a lot of things to attend to before he sails.

DAVID. Yes, and we never know what day we may get our marching orders.

COLONEL JARDINE. I know. I know. But when you went to London yesterday you said you'd come back to-day by the two o'clock train.

DAVID. I told you I missed it.

COLONEL JARDINE. Have you just come now by the five o'clock ?

DAVID. Yes.

MRS. JARDINE. I really don't think it's of so much importance how many trains he missed.

COLONEL JARDINE. But still he ought to have wired. It doesn't take long to write a telegram—if you don't have a lot of women buzzing round you.

(COLONEL and MRS. JARDINE *go out into the garden*.

DAVID *sits at the tea-table and helps himself to tea during the following scene.*)

DAVID. I say, who was that girl watching the polo with Isabel and Vicky ?

MOWBRAY. A Miss Potts. Why ?

DAVID. Oh. I thought it looked like some one else.

MOWBRAY (*puzzled*). Looked ? How did *you* see her ? I thought you'd only just come from the station,

DAVID (*confused*). Yes, but I saw them for a minute—from a distance—on my way up.

MOWBRAY. I don't see how you could possibly have seen them from anywhere between the station and the house. You can only just see the polo ground from the upstairs windows.

DAVID. I was in my room for a minute—just now. That's how I saw them.

MOWBRAY. But we'd finished playing more than half an hour before your train came in. You said you'd come by the five o'clock.

DAVID. Yes, but—I made a mistake.

MOWBRAY. I do wish you'd learn to be straightforward.

(*He emphasises this remark by clapping DAVID on the shoulder. DAVID, in his nervousness, lifting his cup to his lips, spills some tea on his knee.*)

DAVID. Damn it, I've spilt my tea—I haven't a handkerchief.

(*Feels for a handkerchief, and finds he hasn't one.*

MOWBRAY *hands him his.* DAVID *scrubs his knee with it as MOWBRAY speaks.*)

MOWBRAY. You never seem to think it matters if you fib or not, if it saves you the trouble of a little explanation. Really, old man, it won't do. There, I'm not going to preach to you again.

(CHARLES, *the footman, enters to clear away the tea things.* MOWBRAY *lights a cigarette.*)

DAVID (*to CHARLES*). All right, I've finished. (*Looking at the handkerchief as he goes towards MOWBRAY.*) I've made rather a mess of it. I'll put it in my wash. (*Puts handkerchief in his pocket. He has no ulterior motive in doing this.* CHARLES *goes out, having cleared away the tea things.*)

MOWBRAY. David, I need a confidant.

DAVID. Well.

MOWBRAY. Now look interested.

DAVID. I am—awfully interested.

MOWBRAY. You see, I've finished fighting and knocking about, and I've made my pile, and I think it's getting about time I settled down.

DAVID. And married?

MOWBRAY. Bright Boy.

DAVID. Who?

MOWBRAY. You're not as bright as Mrs. Gorringe. She said she'd noticed it at once. And I thought I'd displayed such wonderful reserve. We always do, you know.

DAVID. I've noticed that you seem rather fond of being with—a certain person.

MOWBRAY. A certain Miss——?

DAVID. Isabel.

MOWBRAY (*smiling*). Isabel! I wonder how soon I shall call her Isabel. I really think she rather likes me, don't you?

DAVID. I know she likes you very much, but I don't know that it's anything more.

MOWBRAY. Well, my dear fellow, I don't see how *you* should know. It's what *I've* got to find out.

DAVID. I wouldn't say anything yet.

MOWBRAY (*a little surprised and amused*). Why not?

DAVID. Because—I wouldn't.

MOWBRAY. But I feel in great form for saying something now,—since Mrs. Gorringe made me out such a hero. And if you've noticed, and Mrs. Gorringe has noticed, she must have noticed herself. (*Sees ISABEL from the window.*) By Jove, there she is!

DAVID (*uneasily*). But, Frank, I really don't think this is a good moment.

MOWBRAY. Rubbish, David; it's an ideal moment. Getting dusk; everybody out of the way till dinner—except you,—can't you get out of the way till dinner-time?

(ISABEL enters.)

ISABEL. David! Do you mind ordering the cart to meet the seven twenty-five? The new groom is so stupid, he never gets a message right, or I wouldn't ask you to do it.

DAVID. That's all right. (*He hesitates.*)

ISABEL. Now, please, or he'll have gone home.

(DAVID looks at MOWBRAY, then at ISABEL, and goes out rather reluctantly. ISABEL watches him till he is out of sight.)

ISABEL. Is anything the matter with David?

MOWBRAY. Not that I know of.

ISABEL. I want to talk to you about him.

(Sits on the sofa.)

MOWBRAY. I want to talk to you about myself. (*Sits near her.*)

ISABEL. Afterwards. (*Throughout the following scene her manner is nothing more than friendly. She does not think MOWBRAY is in love with her. His tenderness and earnestness do not make the impression on her that they might at another time, as she is now absorbed in thoughts of DAVID.*) I shouldn't say what I'm going to, only I trust you more than any man I know.

MOWBRAY. You've made me feel prouder than I ever felt before.

ISABEL. I'm glad you're so fond of—David. (*He betrays disappointment when she names DAVID.*) I've often wondered why it is. You are so different.

MOWBRAY. Are we ?

ISABEL. Oh, yes—in everything. The way you play polo, for instance. You are so terribly in earnest. I was watching you this afternoon. Your whole life seemed to depend on winning the game. And when David plays, I can't help seeing that he always knows what a good picture he makes. (*MOWBRAY laughs. Smiles at him.*) He does look very nice, doesn't he ?

MOWBRAY. I rather like his little vanities. He wouldn't be so—so David without them.

ISABEL. He is forgiven many things just because he is David.

MOWBRAY. A charming personality covers a multitude of sins.

ISABEL. Every one likes David, but— What do you think of him ?

MOWBRAY. I never think what I think of people I like.

ISABEL. Do you think I oughtn't to have asked you ?

MOWBRAY. Oh, no. Because I know you like him too.

ISABEL. Yes. But a girl can know so very little about a man's real life. *You* see David as one man of the world sees another ; that's why I ask you what you think of him.

MOWBRAY. When I first met David—I thought him a charming fellow with a weak character. Now—several years later—I think precisely the same thing.

ISABEL. Yes. I know, he isn't bad—but, oh, so weak.

MOWBRAY. But not so young.

ISABEL. No.

MOWBRAY. And if a man doesn't check the weaknesses that are part of his youth, they become part of his character.

ISABEL. I'm afraid that's true.

MOWBRAY. He is one of those people who are so absorbed in the present that they learn nothing from the past and prepare nothing for the future. Of course, he is always *resolving* to spend his time more profitably,—but somehow he never does,—and he mistakes these good resolutions for practical virtues. Whenever he yields to temptation he promptly suffers remorse. He considers remorse is a virtue and sufficient penalty for his sin. Then instead of principles he has a few nice, gentlemanly instincts—and these I think constitute his whole chance of scraping through life respectably. He has no conception that characters are built and don't grow. It's pitiful, isn't it? I know so many men like him—wasters and drifters—and the very best company in the world.

ISABEL. They need some one strong to guide them.

MOWBRAY. Unless it's in the wrong direction—and then,—any one will do.

ISABEL. I *had* to ask you, I *must* know. And there is no one else in the world I can ask. (*Pauses before she says, simply.*) We have been engaged for three years.

MOWBRAY (*concealing his disappointment with difficulty*). Oh, I didn't know. I shouldn't have said that if I'd known.

ISABEL. I'm grateful to you. You have only put into words what I couldn't help feeling was true. I think if we could be married soon I might help him to be the man I used to hope he would be of himself. But I don't see how we can be. David has nothing but his pay. I have a home here, but that's all. Mother and I lived almost on charity after my father died, till mother married Colonel Jardine—so I have no money of my own. That's why we have had to keep our engagement secret. When David asked to be engaged to me three years ago, they wouldn't hear of it. They think it is all over between us now. But it's far from all over.

MOWBRAY. Do you still love him?

ISABEL (*earnestly*). Yes, yes. I *do* love him. But love like mine is such tyranny that sometimes I have almost prayed to escape from it.

MOWBRAY (*tenderly*). Poor child. I know you are brave and self-reliant. (*Trying to force a lighter tone through his emotion.*) You are the general of this household. Any one can see that. (*His emotion getting the better of him.*) But it is hard to *always* have to brace yourself to be a prop to the weak. I know you must often grow weary, and long to lean on some one strong.

ISABEL (*half-sobbing*). Don't—don't say that. (*Trying to smile through her tears.*) I have to go on—being the prop.

MOWBRAY. If we could bear one another's burdens, but we can't carry them far. We all live our inmost lives alone. (*Enter DAVID.*) Ah, David,—finished your stroll ? I'll go and take mine.

(CAPTAIN MOWBRAY goes out.)

DAVID (*with a genuinely generous impulse*). Isabel, I'll go away. I'll set you free if you like.

ISABEL (*taken aback*). David.

DAVID. Am I standing between you and him ?

ISABEL. How can you say that ? Captain Mowbray and I have never been anything more than friends.

DAVID. I thought— (*Takes her by the arm and turns her towards him, looking in her face.*) What has he been saying to you ?

ISABEL (*simply*). We were talking of you. I told him of our engagement.

DAVID. I thought you were beginning to care for him more than you used, and— (*Hesitates, drops his hold of her and turns away.*) I'm so unhappy. (*He sits down and buries his face in his hands.* She stands looking at him with mournful resignation, waiting for him to continue.) You don't know what I've been through this last week. I felt as if I should go mad, I was so angry and jealous—seeing how you seemed to care for him, and how he cared for you and knowing how unworthy I am. I thought you were slipping away from me. The other day I thought I'd make one last effort to keep you—so I went and got that. (*He takes a marriage licence from his pocket and shows it to her.* She peruses it before she speaks.)

ISABEL. You went to the Registry Office and got a licence ?

DAVID. I realised what a mad thing it was to do as

soon as I saw you. You were talking to him. I daren't show it to you, so I went away. That was yesterday. When I left here I fully determined never to come back. I made up my mind to write and tell you you were free and that I'd gone away for ever.

ISABEL (*calmly; returning the licence to him*). Why did you come back?

DAVID. When I got to London I took all my money out of the Bank. You know it isn't much, but I thought it would be enough to get me abroad somewhere. I wanted to get out of it all. I was desperate; then, all at once, I thought I'd give my luck one last chance. I went to a place I know and gambled. I thought perhaps I'd win—win a lot, so that I could come back and ask you to marry me at once. (*Despondently*.) Of course I lost everything. (*Bitterly*.) That's why I came back.

ISABEL. Oh, David—and you promised me you wouldn't gamble again.

DAVID. Do you want me to set you free? I will, if you want.

ISABEL. I've been thinking it might be wiser. (*He turns away*.) Suppose we *do* set each other free. What will become of *you*?

DAVID. It wouldn't matter much what became of me then.

ISABEL. It would matter a great deal to *me*. Oh, David, I've been very loyal to you these three years, but when you disappoint me so and break your promises—you make it very hard for me. You seem to have no ambition and no sense of responsibility. You show so little moral force in every way that I really can't see what makes you stop short of crime.

DAVID. I've tried to keep straight for your sake.

ISABEL. But I want you to do right because it is right.

DAVID. That's the way Frank talks to me. He's strong—so are you. You both have a lot of what you call moral force. That's why you can't understand us who have hardly any. Frank was born to rise. He can do it alone. But I'm what the woman I love makes me.

ISABEL. You make me so afraid.

DAVID. I suppose I'm not worth saving. It's wasting

your good life to try and make something of mine. You'd better give me up.

ISABEL. How can I? Suppose you loved a bad woman?

DAVID. Well?

ISABEL. How could I bear to see you dragged down by a bad woman, knowing that I might have saved you? (*Goes to him with sudden impulse, kneels beside him and puts her arms about him.*) David! David! You must try—try hard—for my sake.

DAVID (*holds her in his arms, speaks brokenly*). Don't let me go. It's only you can save me. I'll try to be different. I can't do it alone. But I'll try to be what you want me to be; I'll begin again—where we began three years ago. You trusted me then. I'll try to make you proud of me again.

ISABEL (*half-crying, as she leans against him*). I was so proud of you then. You will try, dear—won't you? Oh, you will try. (*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. Then she rises, still holding his hand.*) It will be hard work, David. We shall need all our courage.

(*Vicky enters with an open telegram in her hand.*)

VICKY. Isabel. (ISABEL goes towards her. DAVID remains seated and doesn't hear what they say.) Here is a telegram from the detective. He'll be here on the seven twenty-five.

ISABEL (*reading the telegram*). Oh, then I'll go down and meet him. I can tell him all about it on the way up.

VICKY. Well, you'd better hurry up or you'll be late for dinner. Mother and Mrs. Gorringe have gone up to dress already.

(*Vicky goes out.*)

ISABEL. David. (DAVID looks towards her.) I have to go and meet the seven twenty-five. Will you drive me to the station?

DAVID (*smiles*). Yes.

ISABEL. Wait here while I put my things on.

(*ISABEL goes out. It is now dusk. DAVID takes the diamond necklace from an inner pocket and looks at it, his face expressing mental agony. He closes his hand over it.*)

DAVID (*praying earnestly*). Lord, I repent. Help

me to restore it. Help me, dear Lord. Don't bring disgrace upon me now.

ISABEL (*calls without*). David ! (*He starts violently, taking his handkerchief from his pocket, and wrapping it round the necklace.*) David ! (*He looks about distracted, rising with his hand resting on the pedestal for support as ISABEL enters. She wears her hat and jacket and turns on the electric light as she enters.*) I'm ready. (*He hesitates, his hand still resting on the pedestal, which is hidden from her by his body.*) Aren't you coming ? (*He still hesitates. She betrays a little disappointment as she says.*) I thought you'd like to come with me.

DAVID. (*He drops the handkerchief and the necklace in the bowl, then goes to her.*) Yes.

ISABEL (*affectionately*). Let it be like the old times, David. Shall it ?

DAVID (*with a breaking voice*). Yes, dear. It shall be,—like the old times.

(*They go out together.*)

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE.—*The same as Act I. It is the evening of the same day.*

Enter ISABEL, DAVID CAIRN and JERNIGAN, a detective in plain clothes. He is a tall, grave man, approaching middle-age. His manner is always formal and professional. He is never amused by anything the other characters do or say. ISABEL and DAVID are dressed as at end of Act I. All the characters who enter later wear dinner dress.

ISABEL (*entering*). I suppose they are at dinner. (*To JERNIGAN*.) Colonel Jardine will see you here when he has finished. Have you dined yourself?

JERNIGAN. Yes, thank you.

ISABEL. You might like to go to your room now. (*She rings the bell beside the fireplace, then comes to JERNIGAN, speaking so that DAVID, who is standing at a little distance, does not hear her.*) Of course, none of the servants know that you are a detective. I thought it better not to tell them.

JERNIGAN. Certainly.

(CHARLES, *the footman, enters.*)

ISABEL. Show Mr. Jernigan his room, and see that he has everything he wants.

CHARLES. Yes, Miss. (*Holds the door open for JERNIGAN.*)

(JERNIGAN goes out.)

ISABEL. Charles, are they still at dinner?

CHARLES. They've almost done, Miss.

ISABEL. Mr. Cairn and I will dine when they have finished.

CHARLES. Yes, Miss.

(CHARLES goes out and closes the door after him.)

DAVID (*glances at the bowl and says to himself.*) Now. If I could get it back while they are all at dinner !

ISABEL. What are you saying, David ?

DAVID (*turns to her*). Nothing.

ISABEL (*comes to him*). Don't be too down-hearted, dear. I feel sure you are going to conquer, and I'm going to help you. And it isn't as if you'd done something really bad. Now, I'd better go and dress for dinner—so had you.

DAVID. Yes, I'll go directly. I shan't take as long as you.

(MRS. JARDINE *enters.*)

MRS. JARDINE. What's made you so late, Isabel ? We've finished dinner.

ISABEL. The train was late.

MRS. JARDINE. I wonder they don't make the railway guides an hour later, then one would know what time to expect the trains. Did you bring the detective ?

(*David is startled at the mention of a detective, but conceals his dismay from the others.*)

ISABEL (*to David*). I didn't tell you Mr. Jernigan was a detective.

DAVID. What do you want a detective for ?

ISABEL. Mrs. Gorringe has missed her diamond necklace, and we think it may have been stolen.

DAVID. Oh, I hope she'll find it.

(COLONEL JARDINE *enters.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Oh, my dear Isabel, we've finished dinner, and you've not changed.

ISABEL. I shan't be long.

(ISABEL *goes out.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Are you going to sit here, Emily ?

MRS. JARDINE (*who has taken a magazine from the table and seated herself in an armchair*). You can't expect me to sit in the drawing-room and watch Mrs. Gorringe making sheep's eyes at Captain Mowbray. I can't say I enjoyed my dinner. The fish was burnt, and I never did care for meringues. And the way that woman cackled about her diamond necklace was enough to—Well, I'm sick of the whole thing before we've even begun to look for it. (*Peruses her magazine.*) DAVID *goes out.* COLONEL JARDINE *paces moodily up and down with his hands in his pockets.* MRS. JARDINE *casts*

impatient glances at him. He does not notice her. She endures a few moments before she speaks.) I have quite enough to bear, without seeing you sulk.

COLONEL JARDINE. I'm not sulking.

MRS. JARDINE. You are. You haven't said a word since the roast left the table. You know how you annoy me when you sulk. (*She peruses her magazine a moment, then glances at him impatiently as before.*) I wish you'd stop waddling about like that. Can't you see I'm on the verge of hysteria? (*JERNIGAN enters. He pauses on the threshold, MRS. JARDINE stares at him.*) Who's this?

(COLONEL JARDINE goes to meet JERNIGAN. *His manner is more restrained before JERNIGAN than when he is alone with his family. MRS. JARDINE, too wrought up to heed the conventions, puts no constraint upon herself.*)

JERNIGAN. The servant said you would like to see me.

COLONEL JARDINE. Ah, yes. How d'you do? (*Going to MRS. JARDINE.*) Emily, this is Mr. Jernigan, the detective.

MRS. JARDINE (*aside to her husband*). Ought I to shake hands?

COLONEL JARDINE (*aside to her*). No. (*Turns to JERNIGAN.*) My wife, Mr. Jernigan. (*MRS. JARDINE and JERNIGAN bow stiffly to each other.*) Now, I suppose you want to ask me a lot of questions. (*Sits on sofa, signing to JERNIGAN to be seated.*) Well—fire away.

JERNIGAN (*remains standing*). Do you suspect any particular person of having taken this necklace?

COLONEL JARDINE. No.

MRS. JARDINE. We suppose it's one of the servants.

COLONEL JARDINE. My dear—we don't know.

MRS. JARDINE. Who else would steal it?

COLONEL JARDINE. My dear—

MRS. JARDINE (*to her husband*). Allow me to speak, please. (*To JERNIGAN.*) I strongly suspect one of the housemaids, called Pipkin.

JERNIGAN. May I ask why you suspect Pipkin?

MRS. JARDINE. There's something I don't like about her eyes. I didn't like them from the first, and I'm never mistaken in eyes. Then, she's always looking out of the windows, and—oh, several things.

JERNIGAN. I see. (*Taking out a note-book.*) I suppose you keep a large staff of servants ?

MRS. JARDINE (*smiling conceitedly*). Oh, very large. I believe I have more servants than any one in this neighbourhood.

JERNIGAN. Were they all in the house when the robbery was discovered ?

COLONEL JARDINE. No. Some of them were watching the polo.

MRS. JARDINE. I'll ring and find out which of them were in. (*Rings the bell by the fireplace.*)

JERNIGAN (*to COLONEL JARDINE*). You have several guests staying here, I think ?

COLONEL JARDINE. Three.

JERNIGAN. All of them people you know well, and trust ?

COLONEL JARDINE. Oh, certainly.

MRS. JARDINE. I wouldn't be *too* sure.

COLONEL JARDINE (*remonstrating*). My dear.

MRS. JARDINE. You'll never get at it if you are so afraid to suspect any one. I am trying to help Mr. Jernigan with a few suggestions. (*Sits down again in her armchair.*)

(CHARLES enters.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Oh, Charles, I want you to tell me which of the servants went to watch the polo this afternoon ?

CHARLES. All of us, sir.

MRS. JARDINE. Do you mean to say I was left asleep in an empty house ?

CHARLES. Oh, no, ma'am, I was forgetting. One of the maids stayed in.

COLONEL JARDINE. Which one ?

CHARLES. Pipkin.

MRS. JARDINE (*springing up excitedly*). There ! I said all along it was Pipkin. (*To JERNIGAN.*) You'd better go straight to the kitchen and arrest her. Have you got the handcuffs ?

JERNIGAN (*quietly and politely*). One moment, please. (*To CHARLES.*) You are quite sure that no one else was in the house this afternoon, besides the housemaid Pipkin ?

CHARLES. Only the mistress, sir.

JERNIGAN (*to MRS. JARDINE*). Oh, were *you* at home ?

MRS. JARDINE (*reluctantly*). Yes. (*She glances uneasily at the other three.*) I hope you don't suggest that I stole it.

COLONEL JARDINE (*going towards her, to restrain her*). My dear Emily.

MRS. JARDINE. This is a pretty pass you've brought things to, bringing your detectives into the house, and turning the library into a police court. I suppose you know I'm as good as committed to appear at the next Petty Sessions.

JERNIGAN. When was the necklace last seen ?

MRS. JARDINE (*crossly*). I don't know.

COLONEL JARDINE (*to CHARLES*). Ask Mrs. Gorringe to come here. (*CHARLES goes out. COLONEL JARDINE turns to JERNIGAN.*) She'll be able to tell us that.

MRS. JARDINE (*to JERNIGAN*). You see, Mr. Jernigan, if Mrs. Gorringe had locked up her jewels properly, as she ought to have done, all this would never have happened, and we might now be playing bridge as usual.

JERNIGAN. Yes.

(MRS. GORRINGE enters, followed by VICKY, who sits in the window. MRS. GORRINGE comes forward, smiling, and evidently pleased with the importance of her situation.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Mrs. Gorringe, this is Mr. Jernigan the detective. (MRS. GORRINGE bows to JERNIGAN.) Now, he's going to put some questions to you, and you must be very exact in your replies. Think you're in court, you know.

MRS. GORRINGE. I understand.

(Takes up a conspicuous position: very self-conscious from being the centre of interest.)

JERNIGAN. I didn't quite catch the name.

MRS. GORRINGE (pronouncing very distinctly). Gorringe.

JERNIGAN. Mrs. Gorringe.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes, I married Mr. Gorringe in the year ninety-five. Before that I was a Miss Rose Pilkinson of Ipswich. Is it necessary to give the age ?

JERNIGAN. Oh, no, thank you.

MRS. GORRINGE. Thank you. I have had three children—

JERNIGAN (*interrupting her*). Yes, but it's not necessary to give these details now.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, I see.

JERNIGAN. You've lost a diamond necklace?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. It had a pearl clasp.

MRS. JARDINE (*impatiently*). Oh!

JERNIGAN. When did you last see it?

MRS. GORRINGE. Last night, when I went to bed.

JERNIGAN. Did you wear it last evening?

MRS. GORRINGE. No, I wore turquoise.

JERNIGAN. But you remember seeing the necklace when you went to bed?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes, I had it on.

JERNIGAN. When you went to bed?

MRS. GORRINGE. No, before.

JERNIGAN. You had it on after you went to your room, and before you went to bed?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes.

JERNIGAN. Was any one else in your room.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, no. I was quite alone. Mr. Gorringe is at home in Croydon.

JERNIGAN. Were you wearing any other jewelry at the time?

MRS. GORRINGE (*reluctantly*). Yes.

JERNIGAN. I should like to know exactly what other jewellery you had on then.

MRS. GORRINGE. Some bracelets and rings and pins, three necklaces, and some hair ornaments.

JERNIGAN. Had you these ornaments on separately or at one time?

(MRS. GORRINGE *hesitates, glances uneasily at MRS. JARDINE, who is staring at her mercilessly.*)

MRS. GORRINGE. I prefer not to answer that question.

JERNIGAN. I am trying to find out if it is not possible that some one saw you last night with your necklace on.

MRS. GORRINGE (*frightened*). Oh, no, I'm sure no one saw me.

JERNIGAN. As you have not lost any of the other ornaments, I want to know if you had them on separately or at one time.

MRS. GORRINGE (*reluctantly, after looking askance at MRS. JARDINE*). I had them all on together.

(MRS. JARDINE *looks at her husband. VICKY puts her hand over her face. JERNIGAN is unmoved. Nobody laughs.*)

JERNIGAN. Had you any particular reason for wearing them then?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes.

JERNIGAN. What?

MRS. GORRINGE. I wanted to see how I should look as an Oriental.

JERNIGAN. Ah, I understand. Then you don't remember this diamond necklace more particularly than the other jewelry?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes, I do. Because when I took it off I examined it to see if the drops were quite firm. I ought to tell you first that it has five drops in front which come off and make into a tiara—

JERNIGAN (*trying to restrain her*). Yes, yes. And now how did you come to discover the diamonds were missing?

MRS. GORRINGE. Well, I went up to my room when I came in from the polo match, and suppose the dressing-table to be there (*points to VICKY*)—where Miss Jardine is. And the door where this one is. (*Points to the door.*) I came in at the door something like this—(*Goes to the door, opens it, goes just outside and comes in again.*) I closed the door. (*Closes the door, and goes towards VICKY as she says.*) Then I crossed over to the dressing-table in quite an ordinary manner, just as I am doing now. (*When she has nearly arrived at VICKY she stops suddenly.*) Oh, no. I've made a mistake. The dressing-table, of course, would be there. (*Points towards MRS. JARDINE.*) I was thinking of the one at home. (*She pauses a moment undecided, then says.*) I must come in again. (*She then runs to the door, opens it, goes just outside, closes it, opens it again and puts her head just inside to say.*) Now you are to suppose I didn't come in before. (*Takes her head back, and closes the door.*)

MRS. JARDINE (*scarcely able to restrain her impatience*). I shall scream in a minute.

(VICKY begins to shake with laughter, putting her handkerchief over her mouth. The others watch MRS. GORRINGE gravely. MRS. GORRINGE enters and closes the door.)

MRS. GORRINGE. I crossed over to the dressing-table—which, of course, is here now. (*Points to a spot near MRS. JARDINE, walks towards it, and stands still.*) I

opened my jewel-case. I don't know what made me do that then. I suppose I must have had a presentiment. Oh, no. It was to get these rings. (*Bends up her hand to show her rings.*) I thought it looked different somehow, and what was it I said to myself? (*Frowns as she thinks a moment.*) Oh, yes. I remember saying to myself, "Well, that's funny!" Then all at once it came across me like a flash of lightning and I clasped my hands and exclaimed: (*Clasps her hands dramatically.*) "Great heavens, my diamond necklace has gone!" (*Drops her dramatic pose and tone.*) Just like that.

JERNIGAN (*gravely*). I see.

(VICKY, screaming with laughter, and holding her handkerchief over her mouth in a vain attempt to smother the sound, rushes out. Shrieks of hysterical laughter are heard from without. MRS. GORRINGE is very much hurt and annoyed.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Vicky, hush, hush. (*Shuts the door after VICKY, then goes to MRS. JARDINE, as he says.*) My dear, that child is becoming intolerable.

MRS. GORRINGE (*almost crying with indignation, drawing JERNIGAN towards the sofa*). Mr. Jernigan, I want to speak to you privately a moment. (*They sit down.*) Now,—I want the house thoroughly searched for my necklace.

JERNIGAN. Certainly.

MRS. GORRINGE. I want everything done. (*Looks towards COLONEL and MRS. JARDINE to see if they are listening, then moves nearer to JERNIGAN.*) I never saw such indifference as they all show about my loss. This afternoon I could scarcely get them to send for you. They just dawdled over their tea—and Mrs. Jardine didn't want me to say anything at all about it. The way she went on you'd think my diamonds were only paste.

JERNIGAN. I will do everything in my power to recover your jewels.

MRS. GORRINGE. Thank you. It's a most valuable necklace. A lapidary once told me that the middle pendant—I think I told you there were five drops in front—is as large as a roe's egg.

JERNIGAN. A roe's egg.

MRS. GORRINGE. Was it a roe or a pigeon? I forget, but it was some sort of egg.

JERNIGAN. Will you take me to your room ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*misunderstanding him, rises indignant*). Certainly not. I couldn't think of such a thing.

JERNIGAN. If you want me to trace your necklace, I must visit your room first.

MRS. GORRINGE (*seeing her mistake, smiles confusedly*). Oh, I see. Excuse me. (*Addresses COLONEL and MRS. JARDINE.*) Mr. Jernigan and I are going upstairs to my room for a few minutes. (*They stare blankly at her. She explains hastily.*) Any one can come with us. Come, Mr. Jernigan. This way, Mr. Jernigan.

(MRS. GORRINGE goes out, followed by JERNIGAN.

As soon as the door is closed after them, MRS.

JARDINE rises and walks about, giving vent to her suppressed irritation.)

MRS. JARDINE. How I'm to bear the rest of Mrs. Gorringe's visit I don't see. She's only been here three days, and she came for a week, and she's just one of those women who if she came for a week would stay for a week,—whatever happened. I suppose she'll never see what inconvenience she's put us all to by having her necklace stolen. Every one in the house suspected, —especially *me*, it seems.

COLONEL JARDINE. That's nonsense, Emily.

MRS. JARDINE. I never liked Mrs. Gorringe. I don't see how I ever came to invite her here—(*COLONEL JARDINE makes a movement of irritation.*) You needn't do that.

COLONEL JARDINE. Do what ?

(*She imitates the movement of irritation he has just made.*)

MRS. JARDINE. Why, that ! I suppose there'll be no bridge this evening.

COLONEL JARDINE. Why not ?

MRS. JARDINE. Well, who's to play ? You know we can't make a four without Mrs. Gorringe,—not that she's such a good player.

COLONEL JARDINE. We can get some one else.

MRS. JARDINE. And how do you expect *me* to keep my mind on the game with the house in such a state of uproar ? I never can settle properly for the night if I don't have a game of cards. (*Takes her patience-board and cards from a table near the window and brings*

them to the writing-table.) I suppose I must content myself with patience. (Sits at the writing-table, opens her patience-board, and lays out her cards. MOWBRAY enters.)

MOWBRAY. I didn't know Mrs. Gorringe was expecting her husband.

COLONEL JARDINE. She isn't that I know of.

MOWBRAY. Oh, I thought that must be Mr. Gorringe who went into her room with her.

MRS. JARDINE. I suppose she won't be satisfied till she makes a scandal in the house.

(VICKY enters, mimicking MRS. GORRINGE as she moves about.)

VICKY. I came in at the door something like this. I closed the door. I crossed over to my dressing-table in quite an ordinary way, just like this, to get some rings. Then I said to myself, "Great heavens, my diamond necklace has gone!" Just like that.

(*The others watch her, amused, then MRS. JARDINE laughs heartily. She becomes quite amiable in seeing MRS. GORRINGE derided.*)

MRS. JARDINE. Excellent, excellent! Mrs. Gorringe to the life!

MOWBRAY. What's that?

VICKY (becoming suddenly serious). Oh, you don't know.

MRS. JARDINE. You may as well. (Addressing MOWBRAY.) Mrs. Gorringe has lost a diamond necklace.

MOWBRAY. Not the one with the pearl clasp and five drops in front?

MRS. JARDINE (laughing). Yes—— (Seriously.) Really some women are peculiar.

MOWBRAY. Now I see why she talked about it all through dinner and asked me to repeat the story I told you about the fellow who stole a bracelet.

MRS. JARDINE. And that was a detective.

MOWBRAY. Oh, not the father of her three children?

(MRS. GORRINGE enters. MRS. JARDINE betrays her irritation as soon as MRS. GORRINGE speaks and begins packing up her patience-board.)

MRS. GORRINGE (to COLONEL JARDINE). He's going to question the servants now. And he wants to know if you'll go.

COLONEL JARDINE. Yes, yes, certainly.

(COLONEL JARDINE *bustles out*.)

MRS. GORRINGE (*looking archly at CAPTAIN MOWBRAY*). Have you been wondering where I'd run away to for so long ?

MOWBRAY. I am always wondering about you.

MRS. JARDINE. Vicky ! (*VICKY comes to her*. MRS. JARDINE *gives her her patience-board and cards*.) Carry that into the drawing-room for me. I feel as if I couldn't sit in the same room with that woman.

(MRS. JARDINE *goes out*. VICKY *follows her, carrying the patience-board*.)

MOWBRAY. I'm sure I hope you'll soon find your necklace.

MRS. GORRINGE (*sighing*). Thank you, I hope so. (*Archly*.) And until I do I shall expect my friends to do all they can to console me. (*Sits on the sofa*.) Now, amuse me.

MOWBRAY. Shall I sing or recite ?

MRS. GORRINGE. What a tease you are. We were having a delightful talk about something at tea this afternoon, when the others came in and interrupted us. (*Pretending to forget*.) What *were* we talking about ?

MOWBRAY. Polo ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*still as if trying to remember*). I don't think it was polo.

MOWBRAY. Heroes ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*annoyed at his obtuseness*). Oh, no—something interesting.

MOWBRAY. Love ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*archly*). For shame. (*Sits with her back to him, playfully severe*.) I won't speak to you if you're going to be naughty.

MOWBRAY. I remember. You said you noticed—

MRS. GORRINGE (*turning to him, playfully indignant*). I'm sure I never said anything so forward.

MOWBRAY. That I was in love with some one I met in this house.

MRS. GORRINGE (*coyly dropping her eyes*). You're incorrigible.

MOWBRAY. It's all off now. I've withdrawn.

MRS. GORRINGE (*showing the disappointment she feels in this sudden end to her flirtation*). Oh ! (*As he wanders*

away, she looks after him, then says archly) I think I shall have to call you Captain Faint Heart.

MOWBRAY (*turning to her*). But if I can't honourably make love to the lady.

MRS. GORRINGE (*cooingly*). Isn't all fair in love ?

MOWBRAY. It's love itself that's so unfair. It's a field in which merit doesn't count. Incompetence as often wins. The champions must have bright eyes, smooth cheeks, and charming ways. That's all they need. An old stager is too heavily handicapped when he has to run against a youngster.

MRS. GORRINGE (*enjoying herself immensely again*). So there's a youngster in love with your fair lady too ! This is most interesting. (*Laughs*.)

MOWBRAY (*grimly*). Quite laughable, isn't it ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Poor Captain Faint Heart. But I daresay the lady would listen to you before the youngster.

MOWBRAY (*says earnestly*). Oh, do you think so ?

MRS. GORRINGE. I didn't say she'd listen to either. (*MOWBRAY moves away. MRS. GORRINGE looks after him in mild surprise.*) I declare, I believe you're quite in earnest.

MOWBRAY (*looking at her*). In earnest ? Did you suppose I was flirting ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*smiling pensively*). I thought there might be just a soupçon of reality in it.

MOWBRAY (*sighing half-humorously*). Just a soupçon —eh ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*coming towards him*). How could I believe you meant more ? (*With a touch of reproach in her tone.*) Did you think I should have let you go on if I'd known your heart was involved ?

MOWBRAY. You knew all along it was hopeless ?

MRS. GORRINGE (*sentimentally*). Yes. It is hopeless. I'm not angry with you.

MOWBRAY (*puzzled*). Angry ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Perhaps I'm even a little proud of my conquest.

MOWBRAY. Your conquest ?

MRS. GORRINGE. But I hope I shall never forget my duty to Mr. Gorringe and the children.

(*The shock of surprise is so great to MOWBRAY*

that he laughs. MRS. GORRINGE looks extremely hurt, and seeing she has made a mistake hurries towards the door.)

MOWBRAY (*trying not to laugh*). I beg your pardon, Mrs. Gorringe—but there must have been a mistake.

(*MRS. GORRINGE does not quite go out of the door, but stands with her hand on the handle, considering a moment. She then breaks into forced laughter and comes towards MOWBRAY.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*pretending to be in fits of laughter, which are obviously forced*). So you thought—that I thought—you meant me. What a trick I played on you! It was too bad of me. But, oh, what fun it was! I took you in so beautifully. You ought to have seen your face. It was fun—such fun—oh, what fun! (*Finding her vocabulary exhausted, and as MOWBRAY doesn't help her, but only watches her, she goes towards the door, still laughing. As she does so MOWBRAY turns away. She stops laughing suddenly when she reaches the door, smothers an angry exclamation and goes out in a huff.*)

MOWBRAY (*chuckling to himself*). Mr. Gorringe and the children. What a morass that woman's mind must be.

(*DAVID enters, dressed in his evening clothes.*)

DAVID. Where are the others?

MOWBRAY. Hunting for Mrs. Gorringe's necklace with five pearl clasps and a drop in front. It's a great secret. Everybody's talking about it.

DAVID. Oh, I didn't hear them, but I've been dining alone with Isabel.

MOWBRAY (*looking earnestly at DAVID*). David, be very good to that girl.

DAVID. I did offer to let her off. I told her if she thought she could be happier with you—

MOWBRAY. What did she say?

DAVID. She said you'd never been any more than friends. I don't think she ever thought of you any other way.

MOWBRAY (*slowly, with a sigh*). No, I don't think she ever did. She doesn't think every man is in love with her—like some people. She can be a friend. It's a wonderful thing in a woman.

DAVID (*troubled*). I know it's not right that a bungler like me should stand between you and Isabel.

MOWBRAY (*generously*). You aren't to blame. Nobody is. It's just one of those damned things that can't be helped. And you must try not to be a bungler. And I must try what my philosophy is worth.

DAVID. You always had lots of philosophy, hadn't you ?

MOWBRAY. Oh, lots—to give away. It's so easy to be a philosopher in one's unimpassioned moments. (*With conviction.*) But I believe in my philosophy all the same, and when I've had time to remember that I'm only one man in a big world, with no special licence to have everything my own way, I shall find there are still a few things worth living for. But I must be alone.

DAVID. Shall I go ?

MOWBRAY. No, I didn't mean that. But I can't stay in this house now. It's an impossible situation—so I think I shall just pack my things and go up to London to-night.

DAVID. How are you going to explain it ?

MOWBRAY (*meditating*). Yes—that's awkward. I don't want to explain it. I'll leave a note and say I was called away, and you can back me up in the morning.

DAVID. I'm awfully sorry.

MOWBRAY. That's all right. And we're just as good pals as ever, aren't we, old boy ?

(MOWBRAY goes out. DAVID stands still a few moments, expressing trouble and anxiety in his face. He glances at the bowl.)

DAVID. No one has guessed yet. Shall I never get a chance of taking it back ?

ISABEL (*heard outside*). I suppose we can't do anything more to-night ?

(Enter MRS. JARDINE, MRS. GORRINGE and ISABEL, now wearing an evening dress.)

MRS. JARDINE. I can't say I think much of your detective, Mrs. Gorringe, spending a whole evening ransacking the house and then finding nothing.

ISABEL. It may not be in the house.

MRS. GORRINGE (*mournfully*). No. Most likely at this very moment they're boiling it down in some thieves' kitchen. Oh, dear ! (*Nearly cries.* ISABEL comforts her.)

MRS. JARDINE (*turns to ISABEL*). I suppose you've heard the latest ?

ISABEL. No—what ?

MRS. JARDINE. They accuse *me*.

ISABEL (*laughing incredulously*). Oh, mother !

MRS. JARDINE. You weren't here when he cornered me in his nasty police court way and forced me to admit I was alone in the house with Pipkin.

ISABEL. What did he say ?

MRS. JARDINE. It wasn't what he said. It was the look he gave me. You know I'm never mistaken in eyes.

ISABEL. We are all equally under suspicion ; every one who was in the house since Mrs. Gorringe saw her diamonds.

MRS. JARDINE (*with scarcely veiled contempt*). Yes—since you dressed up in all your jewels, Mrs. Gorringe—to see how you would look as an Oriental. (*Pauses before she adds.*) That only lets David off. (*DAVID starts slightly, unnoticed by the others.*) It's a lucky thing for you, David, that you had to go away yesterday. You are the only person in the house who couldn't have stolen Mrs. Gorringe's necklace. (*An expression of relief passes over DAVID'S face for a moment, then he looks gloomy again.* VICKY enters.)

VICKY. I've come to say good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Gorringe. (*Kisses her.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*sadly*). Good-night, dear.

VICKY (*kissing her mother*). Good-night, mother.

MRS. JARDINE. I suppose it's nearly time for us all to retire ; not that we shall sleep, but it's been such a dreadful day we may as well finish it as soon as possible.

MRS. GORRINGE. I feel so timid about going to bed in that room.

ISABEL. David has the room next yours, and you can have a bell by your bed if you like.

MRS. GORRINGE. But suppose the thief should enter in the dead of night and should seize my hand before I could grasp the bell, thinking to find rings upon it, or my throat before I could scream, thinking to find a necklace there.

ISABEL. Would you like to share my room ? (*DAVID listens intently for the answer.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*eagerly*). Oh, thank you, yes. I'll

go and take my things there. I think we'd better put what's left of my jewelry under our pillows.

ISABEL. Won't that be rather uncomfortable?

MRS. GORRINGE. I'll give *you* the flat cases and take the lumpy ones myself. Good-night, Mr. David. (*Goes to MRS. JARDINE, offering to kiss her.*) Good-night, Mrs. Jardine!

MRS. JARDINE (*embracing MRS. GORRINGE and kissing her affectionately on each cheek.*) Good-night, dear Mrs. Gorringe. Sleep well. (*MRS. GORRINGE goes out.*) What a woman! (*MRS. JARDINE and VICKY go out.*)

DAVID. Isabel. (*She comes to him.*) I am going to try and be worthy of you.

ISABEL. You're beginning to be hopeful.

DAVID. Yes.

ISABEL. You looked so depressed I was almost sorry for what I said.

DAVID. You did me a world of good. I think you saved me.

(COLONEL JARDINE *enters, drawing MOWBRAY by the arm. MOWBRAY wears an overcoat and carries a suit-case in his hand. JERNIGAN follows them and stands near the door.*)

COLONEL JARDINE (*in his most jovial manner, laughing and drawing MOWBRAY along.*) What do you think I found this rascal doing? Sneaking out of the house to get the last train without saying a word to any of us.

MOWBRAY (*embarrassed*). I was called away. I left a note and asked David to explain.

ISABEL (*seeing MOWBRAY is embarrassed, goes towards him to help him out.*) Father, Captain Mowbray may be going on important business. Don't make him miss his train.

JERNIGAN (*comes forward*). Excuse me. (*They all look towards JERNIGAN.*) No one ought to leave the house to-night if it can possibly be avoided.

(DAVID *turns away to conceal his alarm from the others.*)

MOWBRAY (*readily*). Certainly. (*Puts his suit-case on the floor.*)

JERNIGAN (*naturally,—not at all suspicious of MOWBRAY*). Just while this enquiry is going on.

MOWBRAY. Yes, I see. I didn't think of that. I'll stay. (*Stoops to pick up his suit-case.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Don't you bother about that, the servant will take it up.

MOWBRAY. Thank you.

COLONEL JARDINE (*to JERNIGAN*). Now, I'm thinking of going to bed. Do you want me for anything more to-night?

JERNIGAN. No, I can get on all right. I may look about the house after you have retired, but I shan't disturb any one.

(*COLONEL JARDINE and MOWBRAY and JERNIGAN go out.*)

ISABEL. Now I must rush up and help Mrs. Gorringe to install herself in my room. She's sure to bring about a dozen dressing-gowns and little jackets. You wait here and then I'll come back and say good-night to you properly.

(*Goes out quickly, smiling back at DAVID.*)

DAVID (*with decision*). Her room is empty and next to mine. I'll take it back now.

(*He crosses quickly to the bowl, looks hastily towards the door, then dips his hand in the bowl. MOWBRAY strolls in. He has taken off his overcoat. He pauses and looks at DAVID. He shows plainly that his curiosity is aroused. He closes the door. Hearing the door close, DAVID takes his hand quickly from the bowl, turns round and sees MOWBRAY. He is uncertain whether MOWBRAY has noticed anything or not. He comes towards him with an assumption of ease.*)

DAVID. Hullo, Frank.

MOWBRAY. Hullo.

DAVID. It's awfully hard lines to have to stay when you're feeling so bad about it.

MOWBRAY (*searching the book-shelves and the writing-table*). Yes, but it can't be helped.

DAVID (*after a slight pause*). Aren't you going up?

MOWBRAY. Not yet. I shall stay here awhile. I was looking for something to read, but I can't find anything I want. (*Sees his suit-case.*) Oh. (*Pulls it towards him and unstraps it as he speaks.*) I have a book here that I took to read in the train. (*Opens the suit-case*)

and takes out a book, lets the lid of the case fall down without shutting it.) If they aren't coming back, we may as well make ourselves comfortable. (Puts his feet up on the sofa, facing DAVID, opens the book and reads. DAVID looks at him undecidedly, then strolls towards the window. When his back is turned, MOWBRAY glances up from his book and watches DAVID. When DAVID turns towards him he pretends to be absorbed in his book.)

DAVID. I say, Frank, Isabel asked me to wait for her here.

MOWBRAY (*without looking up*). Did she ?

DAVID. She's coming back to say good-night to me.

MOWBRAY (*as before*). Oh.

DAVID. We can't very well say good-night with you in the room.

MOWBRAY. Then say it in another room. (*Continues reading.*)

DAVID. Well, how long are you going to stay here ?

MOWBRAY (*without looking up*). An hour or two. (*DAVID goes out into the garden reluctantly, looking back at MOWBRAY from the window. MOWBRAY appears to be absorbed in his book. As soon as DAVID is out of sight, MOWBRAY throws down his book, jumps up, goes quickly to the bowl, dips his hand in, takes out the necklace wrapped in the handkerchief, unwraps the handkerchief and discovers the necklace.*) Good God !

(ISABEL enters.)

MOWBRAY. Look here, I know I can trust you ; I've found the necklace. (*She looks at the necklace with great surprise.*)

ISABEL. Where ?

MOWBRAY. In that bowl. (*Indicates the bowl.*) Take it back to her room—and say—

(JERNIGAN enters.)

JERNIGAN. I beg your pardon. I have just come in to make a thorough search here— (*Points to the necklace in ISABEL's hands.*) May I see what you have there ?

ISABEL. The necklace. Captain Mowbray has just found it in that bowl.

(ISABEL looks at MOWBRAY. He nods. She gives the necklace to JERNIGAN.)

JERNIGAN. I'll take charge of it.

ISABEL. I'll go and tell her it's found. (*Going towards the door.*)

MOWBRAY (*going towards the garden entrance*). I must go and see David.

(ISABEL goes out.)

JERNIGAN. It's a most unpleasant duty, but I am bound to ask if you wish to make any explanation.

MOWBRAY (*hesitates a moment*). I? None.

JERNIGAN. Do you mind telling me what made you look in there? (*Indicating the bowl.*)

MOWBRAY. I'd rather not say anything yet. It's a little late to disturb the household. You and I will see the Colonel in the morning.

(MOWBRAY goes out into the garden.)

JERNIGAN (*looks after MOWBRAY, then looks into the bowl. Next he examines the handkerchief to see if it has a name on it. He then kneels beside the suit-case, opens it, finds another handkerchief, compares the two and exclaims*). Mowbray!

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE.—*Same as Acts I. and II. It is after breakfast the next morning. DAVID and ISABEL are standing, looking in each other's eyes, holding each other's hands. ISABEL is dressed to go out.*

ISABEL. I shall tell them I'm going to do my shopping, and you follow me in a few minutes.

DAVID. Yes.

(MOWBRAY enters from the garden.)

MOWBRAY. Are you going out ?

ISABEL. Yes. I'm going into the town.

(ISABEL goes out.)

MOWBRAY. Last night when I came to tell you where I found Mrs. Gorringe's necklace, I couldn't get much out of you.

DAVID. I felt awfully sleepy.

MOWBRAY. I suppose you're wide awake this morning.

DAVID (smiling—uneasily). Yes—why ?

MOWBRAY. It was seeing you take your hand out of that bowl that made me look there afterwards.

DAVID. I remember you saying that.

MOWBRAY. I've been wondering ever since what you could have been looking there for ?

DAVID. Oh—for matches. They sometimes keep a box there.

MOWBRAY. It was funny that when you were looking for the matches you didn't see the necklace.

DAVID. Yes. I don't know how it was.

MOWBRAY. H'm. (DAVID turns away.) Is that all you've got to say about it ?

DAVID (trying to bluff MOWBRAY). You trust my word—don't you ?

MOWBRAY (looks at him sorrowfully, goes to him and

lays his hand on him as he says). My dear old boy, I'm the best friend you have.

DAVID (*uneasily*). I know that.

MOWBRAY (*looking at his face*). Have you nothing more to tell me ?

DAVID (*glances uneasily at MOWBRAY before he answers*). No. (*Moves away.*)

(COLONEL JARDINE enters.)

COLONEL JARDINE. David, I hear you've got your marching orders.

DAVID. Yes. We sail on Friday. I must join to-night, so I shall have to leave here this morning.

COLONEL JARDINE. We shall be sorry to lose you.

DAVID. Thank you. (*Takes up a newspaper and pretends to read it, as he listens anxiously to the other two.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Well, now, Mowbray, what would you do about Mrs. Gorringe's necklace, if you were in my place ?

MOWBRAY (*deliberately*). Nothing.

COLONEL JARDINE (*surprised*). Nothing ? Pooh, nonsense ! Must do something. It's only fair to Mrs. Gorringe.

MOWBRAY. Mrs. Gorringe has got it back.

COLONEL JARDINE. Yes, but—it was a very awkward thing, you know, her losing it in our house. We ought to go to the bottom of this.

MOWBRAY. I should think, as she is a visitor here, she'd be very unwilling to make any trouble about it.

COLONEL JARDINE. But still, you know—it makes me feel very insecure. If one of the servants is a thief, I want to know which it is.

MOWBRAY. It never seems quite fair to suppose that it's one of the servants just because you've no evidence that it isn't.

COLONEL JARDINE. It can't be one of us.

MOWBRAY (*speaks very earnestly, aiming his words at DAVID as well as at COLONEL JARDINE*). It may be some one who fell suddenly in a moment of overwhelming temptation. This may be the first and last crime of some one—going about the house this morning showing an inscrutable face but hiding a heart that's quivering with shame and terror. If you track him with detectives you'll make a criminal of him ; you'll push him into that

damning underworld of society which is the only one open to the gaol-bird. If you let this thing rest now—persuade your detective it was a mistake—say the necklace was only mislaid, and send him away—you may save a man.

(*He stands watching the effects of his words on COLONEL JARDINE. DAVID watches them furtively with painful anxiety.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. You make me extremely uncomfortable. It's taking such a responsibility either way.

MOWBRAY. Give him the chance.

COLONEL JARDINE. But—he may be a regular thief—or he may be she.

MOWBRAY. Then give *her* the chance.

COLONEL JARDINE. I don't know that it's quite fair to Mrs. Gorringe not to sift this thing to the bottom.

MOWBRAY. But, Colonel—if you take away a man's last chance of turning honest—think how uncomfortable you'll feel for the rest of your life.

COLONEL JARDINE. I *am* thinking of that.

MOWBRAY. Never to know another good night's rest.

COLONEL JARDINE. Stop that, Mowbray.

MOWBRAY. Colonel, you used to be the best-hearted man in your regiment. Your only fault, as a soldier, was that you were a bit too kind, but it's a fault that becomes you now you've retired.

COLONEL JARDINE (*smiles, well pleased with himself*). Oh, my dear fellow—what nonsense.

MOWBRAY. Live up to your reputation !

COLONEL JARDINE. Well, perhaps we'd better let this thing slide now.

MOWBRAY. Shall I tell the detective ? (*About to go and do so. COLONEL JARDINE stops him.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. No. I'll tell him. I shall have to give him something for himself.

MOWBRAY. Then we may consider it settled ?

COLONEL JARDINE. Yes.

(*DAVID can scarcely conceal his relief. He lays down his paper and goes out.*)

COLONEL JARDINE (*still smiling under the influence of MOWBRAY'S flattery*). I suppose I am a soft-hearted old duffer, but you know I'm a happier man for it.

MOWBRAY. Of course you are ; and what a rare combination that is. A soft heart and a hard brain.

COLONEL JARDINE (*delighted*). You've noticed the working of my brain !

MOWBRAY. With amazement.

(MRS. GORRINGE *enters from the garden*.)

MRS. GORRINGE (*cordially greeting* COLONEL JARDINE). Good-morning. Isn't it a lovely day ?

MOWBRAY (*cheerfully*). Good-morning, Mrs. Gorringe.

MRS. GORRINGE (*bows coldly*). Good-morning.

COLONEL JARDINE. So you've got your necklace back.

MRS. GORRINGE (*in an aggrieved tone*). That detective won't give it me. He says he is going to keep it himself.

MOWBRAY. Only during the investigation.

MRS. GORRINGE. That's what *he* says. How do I know he won't keep it altogether. I should never have sent for him if I'd known he was going to behave like that.

MOWBRAY (*amused*). Did you tell him so ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Not in so many words. But when he refused to give it up, I couldn't help saying "Oh ! "

MOWBRAY. By Jove ! that was severe.

COLONEL JARDINE. Let me explain it to you.

MRS. GORRINGE. I don't want explanations. I want my necklace.

MOWBRAY. You'll get it back at once— (MRS. GORRINGE *turns quickly to MOWBRAY*) —if you persuade the detective you mislaid it.

MRS. GORRINGE. But I didn't mislay it.

MOWBRAY. Couldn't you stretch the truth just about a quarter of an inch ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Why ?

MOWBRAY. To make it meet charity. Say you put your necklace there yourself. (*Points to the bowl*.)

MRS. GORRINGE. He would think me a silly woman.

COLONEL JARDINE. You see, Mrs. Gorringe, we don't want to prosecute any one if we can avoid it. It has just occurred to me that the thief may be some poor fellow who wants to turn honest—so give him a chance.

MOWBRAY. Don't trample on the Colonel's generous impulses.

MRS. GORRINGE. But what about my other jewels ?

COLONEL JARDINE. Good gracious ! You haven't lost anything else ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Not yet. But if I give him a chance I shall. He might take my rubies next, or my emerald lizard.

COLONEL JARDINE (*becoming uncomfortable*). To be sure, we might all lose our valuables. It wasn't entirely my suggestion to let the matter drop. In fact, it was Mowbray's.

MRS. GORRINGE (*with marked disapproval*). Then I consider that Captain Mowbray took a great deal upon himself.

MOWBRAY. Don't trample on *my* generous impulses.

MRS. GORRINGE. It's all very well for gentlemen to talk about being generous to thieves. They never have any jewelry to speak of. (*Turns her back on MOWBRAY.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Mrs. Gorringe is very wise to think about her other jewels.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes, am I not wise ?

MOWBRAY. I don't think the emerald lizard is in danger, as, after this, Mrs. Gorringe is sure to be more careful what she leaves about.

MRS. GORRINGE. I shall do exactly as I please about locking up my jewelry.

MOWBRAY (*persuasively, to MRS. GORRINGE*). Though *our* generous impulses don't move you, I'm sure, from what I know of you, your own will.

MRS. GORRINGE (*trying to be dignified and firm*). I beg you will not try to flatter me again. I don't like it. If Mr. Gorringe were here, I should certainly speak to him about it. (*Moves away from him.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Of course, Mrs. Gorringe must keep the detective if she wants to.

MOWBRAY (*calculating the effect of his words on MRS. GORRINGE*). I suppose there's nothing for it but to find the thief and try him—while Scotland Yard keeps the necklace.

MRS. GORRINGE. Eh !— (*To COLONEL JARDINE.*) How long will that take ?

COLONEL JARDINE. Oh—a few weeks.

MRS. GORRINGE (*in dismay*). Weeks !

MOWBRAY. Months—more likely.

MRS. GORRINGE. Months !

MRS. GORRINGE. Now, what shall we do?

MRS. GORRINGE. I don't care what you do, as long as I get my necklace back. I must say I think the whole affair looks extremely fishy.

MRS. GORRINGE. Well, let's go and interview this fellow Jernigan. (*Goes towards the door, then stops.*) But you know, I don't like this tarradiddling with Scotland Yard.

MOWBRAY (*seriously*). Nor do I, I don't like it at all. (*To MRS. GORRINGE.*) But, believe me, it's for the best. (*MRS. GORRINGE goes out.*) Believe me, Mrs. Gorrингe, it is for the best.

(*MRS. GORRINGE tosses her head, takes up a newspaper and turns her back on MOWBRAY.* MOWBRAY goes out.)

MRS. GORRINGE (*with the newspaper in her hand*). Just because he has been out to South Africa, he thinks he can teach us everything. They are so determined to hush it up, I suppose there'll be nothing about it in the paper. (*MRS. JARDINE enters.*) They aren't going to try and find out who stole my necklace.

MRS. JARDINE. It seems funny *you* should know that, Mrs. Gorrингe. I have not been consulted yet.

MRS. GORRINGE. Captain Mowbray has persuaded Colonel Jardine to send the detective away.

MRS. JARDINE. Since when did Captain Mowbray become the mistress of this house?

MRS. GORRINGE. That's what *I* felt inclined to ask. I never met such a forward busybody as he is.

MRS. JARDINE (*bridling quickly*). I'm sorry you don't like our guests, Mrs. Gorrингe.

MRS. GORRINGE. I don't blame *you*, dear Mrs. Jardine—not for anything. I'm sure you had no idea—when you invited me—that my necklace would be stolen. And I shan't let it make any difference between us. I shall still stay my week out.

MRS. JARDINE (*after a moment of dismay, says very politely*). Of course, if you prefer to curtail your visit, I shall quite understand.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, no, dear. I really have no ill-feeling about it, but I suppose I shall never convince you if I don't stay on, so I'll even extend my visit a little if you like. (*Sits smiling on the sofa.*)

MRS. JARDINE (*with a forced smile*). Oh, I hope you will.

MRS. GORRINGE (*cheerfully*). Of course I will.

[VICKY enters, followed by COLONEL JARDINE with the necklace, which he gives to MRS. GORRINGE.

VICKY. Here it is !

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, thank you. (*Purrs over her necklace*.)

VICKY. Let me see it. (*Tries to take the necklace in her hands*. MRS. GORRINGE *draws it away and holds it up for her to see at a safe distance*. VICKY *touches it with her finger as she says*.) There they are ! There are the five drops in front and there's the pearl clasp.

MRS. JARDINE. Christopher, have you sent the detective away ? (*Holds up her hand to prevent him answering*.) Wait ! Before you tell me, perhaps you'd better go and ask Captain Mowbray's permission.

COLONEL JARDINE (*good-naturedly*). Nonsense, Emily ! I told Jernigan if he'd like to stay till noon I'd show him round the place.

MRS. JARDINE. A very superfluous attention.

COLONEL JARDINE (*smiling conceitedly*). Oh, well. It never does us any harm to be good-natured ; we feel all the happier for it. He'll be so pleased he won't expect a present.

MRS. GORRINGE (*purring over her necklace*). I do wish I knew who stole you.

MRS. JARDINE (*with decision*). There isn't any doubt at all in my mind.

COLONEL JARDINE. Who ?

MRS. JARDINE. Pipkin. Nothing will ever convince me otherwise.

COLONEL JARDINE (*unconscious that he is quoting MOWBRAY. He thinks it is his own sentiment*). It never seems quite fair to suppose it's one of the servants just because you've got no evidence that it isn't.

MRS. JARDINE (*obstinately*). I shall certainly discharge Pipkin.

COLONEL JARDINE. We have no proof against her.

MRS. JARDINE. I have all the proof I want. (*Turns to the others and speaks as if she were delivering a strong argument*.) If she had no motive for concealing the necklace, she'd have found it when she did the room.

That proves that if she is innocent—she doesn't do the rooms.

VICKY (*giggling*). Oh, mother, you are so funny!

COLONEL JARDINE (*thoughtfully*). In spite of what Mowbray said, I think we ought to get to the root of this matter.

MRS. GORRINGE. So do I.

COLONEL JARDINE. If Isabel had left it to me, instead of sending for a detective on her own account, I've no doubt I could have sifted this thing down myself. It only needs a little cross-examination. (*He sets about his cross-examination in a quick, alert way which he thinks is business-like and penetrating.* MRS. GORRINGE *pays the deepest attention.* MRS. JARDINE *superciliously ignores them.* *He addresses MRS. GORRINGE, speaking rapidly.*) Now, you say you saw the necklace for the last time the night before it was lost, but you didn't see it in the morning. No. You saw it again in the afternoon—that is, you saw it wasn't there in the afternoon. Is that right?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes.

COLONEL JARDINE (*without waiting for MRS. GORRINGE to say more, shoots his next question at MRS. JARDINE*). Now, then, where were you? (*Waits for her to reply. She ignores him by turning her chair with its back to him.*)

MRS. GORRINGE. Mrs. Jardine was here.

COLONEL JARDINE (*turns quickly to MRS. GORRINGE*). Oh, she was here.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. On this sofa. (*Pats the sofa.*)

COLONEL JARDINE (*addressing MRS. GORRINGE in the same alert manner*). Oh—well, now. You didn't see it practically all yesterday, so it might have been taken any time yesterday up to the time you found it was taken. You can't tell. (*Dwells on next line as if he were making an important point.*) But you did see it the night before?

MRS. GORRINGE (*deeply impressed*). Yes.

COLONEL JARDINE. Well, now—we've got that far. (*Turns suddenly to MRS. JARDINE.*) When did you last see it? (*She still ignores him.*) Emily, when did you last see Mrs. Gorrингe's necklace? (*She slowly changes her position, elaborately ignoring them.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*after a pause, during which she and*

COLONEL JARDINE *both watch MRS. JARDINE*). Please say when you last saw it.

(A look of irritation passes over MRS. JARDINE'S face when MRS. GORRINGE speaks.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Emily, we are trying to sift this thing down. I want you to say when you last saw Mrs. Gorringe's necklace.

MRS. GORRINGE. We can't go on till you do.

(A long pause, during which COLONEL JARDINE and MRS. GORRINGE watch MRS. JARDINE, waiting for her reply. She shows signs of growing impatience.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Emily.

(MRS. JARDINE begins to writhe with annoyance.)

MRS. GORRINGE. Please say, Mrs. Jardine.

MRS. JARDINE *(unable to curb herself any longer, rises and rounds on MRS. GORRINGE)*. Hold your tongue.

(MRS. GORRINGE utters a scream of surprise and indignation. Then there is dead silence, during which they all remain perfectly still, no one looking at any one else. ISABEL enters, looks round in surprise. They all remain still as waxworks.)

ISABEL. What's happened ?

MRS. JARDINE. Your father thinks he was cut out for a detective, and as if I wasn't on the rack long enough yesterday, he must begin goading me with questions again this morning.

MRS. GORRINGE. I'm sure Colonel Jardine didn't mean to goad you.

MRS. JARDINE *(turning angrily to MRS. GORRINGE)*. If you'd lock your things up properly, instead of letting them lie about all over the house, we should have been saved all this turmoil.

(They are all shocked as before. MRS. GORRINGE utters another scream. ISABEL tries to calm her mother.)

ISABEL. Mother !

MRS. JARDINE *(refuses to be calmed)*. Yes, I mean it. My house was a happy home till she came. Now I can't tell it from a police court.

(MRS. GORRINGE screams again. The other three all remonstrate at once with MRS. JARDINE.)

ISABEL and VICKY (*together*). Mother !

COLONEL JARDINE. My dear !

MRS. JARDINE. I was surrounded by a loving family, and now see them turn on me. (*To MRS. GORRINGE.*) And it's all *you* !

MRS. GORRINGE (*wildly*). Do you know what you are saying ?

ISABEL (*to MRS. JARDINE*). Don't say any more.

MRS. JARDINE. Oh, of course, you all take Mrs. Gorringe's side and turn on me. That's just what I should have expected of you.

MRS. GORRINGE (*rises and tries to assume dignity as she addresses MRS. JARDINE*). I could say a good deal. I might say how unsympathetic you have been all along about my necklace, but I think it would be more dignified simply to draw my visit to a close.

(*Goes out.*)

MRS. JARDINE (*muttering after her*). About time, too.

ISABEL (*to VICKY, as MRS. GORRINGE goes out*). You go with Mrs. Gorringe.

(*VICKY goes out after MRS. GORRINGE.*)

ISABEL. Now, mother, do pull yourself together and apologise to her.

MRS. JARDINE. Apologise ? She'll want to stay her week out.

ISABEL. You're breaking all the laws of hospitality.

MRS. JARDINE. Whoever made the laws of hospitality didn't know Mrs. Gorringe. I'd believe anything of that woman. I'd like to know what she was before Mr. Gorringe married her—if they are married.

ISABEL (*protesting*). Mother !

COLONEL JARDINE. She said she was a Miss Rose Pilkington of Ipswich.

MRS. JARDINE (*derisively*). Ipswich ! A shop-keeper's daughter, I suppose. Chemist, I should think. Can't you see the sign over the shop door, "Pilkington. Chemist" ? Gold letters on a black ground. (*Having really convinced herself that MRS. GORRINGE was a chemist's daughter.*) That accounts for her lack of breeding. No lady would quarrel with her hostess. But I suppose she can't be expected to know better—poor thing—with her upbringing.

(*VICKY enters quickly.*)

VICKY. Mrs. Gorringe says she won't stay another minute.

(MRS. GORRINGE enters. *Her only change of dress is that she now wears her hat.* MRS. JARDINE turns her back on MRS. GORRINGE.)

MRS. GORRINGE. No, I couldn't think of it. I flew upstairs and opened the wardrobe and simply snatched the first hat I saw. I didn't even stop to get a veil. Then I flew down again, and, now, though it's damp under foot this morning, I'm going out in my house shoes. (*Goes to COLONEL JARDINE, extending her hand cordially.*) Good-bye. (*Shakes hands cordially with ISABEL.*) Good-bye.

ISABEL. But you aren't going to the train that way.

MRS. GORRINGE (*pleasantly*). Oh, no; I'm only going to Miss Potts'.

(MRS. GORRINGE and MRS. JARDINE look at each other, up and down; then turn away contemptuously. MRS. GORRINGE goes out, followed by VICKY.)

MRS. JARDINE. Now, let us breathe again. I feel as if we'd had some infectious disease in the house.

(MRS. JARDINE goes out.)

ISABEL. How did it all begin?

COLONEL JARDINE (*scratches his head, puzzled*). I hardly know. Your mother is so uncertain. She answered the detective's questions all right. I don't see why she wouldn't answer mine. I was just trying to sift this thing down with a little cross-examination. You know I think we ought to find out who took that necklace.

ISABEL. So do I.

(JERNIGAN enters.)

JERNIGAN. I'm ready to be shown round, if it's convenient to you.

COLONEL JARDINE. Oh, yes. Sit down a minute. (JERNIGAN and COLONEL JARDINE sit on the sofa, ISABEL at a little distance.) I was just saying, I think I ought to know who took that necklace.

JERNIGAN (*surprised*). I understood you to say it was only mislaid.

COLONEL JARDINE. Oh, yes—so I did, didn't I? But my wife doesn't agree with me. She still believes that

the housemaid, Pipkin, is the culprit. She's going to discharge her.

JERNIGAN (*deliberately*). If it was stolen—I don't think it was by one of your servants.

ISABEL. Mr. Jernigan evidently suspects some one.

COLONEL JARDINE. Then speak out.

JERNIGAN. All the evidence I have been able to gather points against one of your guests.

ISABEL. Oh !

COLONEL JARDINE. Good gracious ! But we only have—well, there's David Cairn—we've always known him ; besides, he was away when it was stolen.

JERNIGAN. I don't suspect Mr. Cairn.

COLONEL JARDINE. It couldn't be Mrs. Gorringe. She wouldn't steal her own necklace.

JERNIGAN. You have one other guest.

COLONEL JARDINE. You can't mean Mowbray.

JERNIGAN. Last night Captain Mowbray attempted to leave the house quietly with a bag. Soon afterwards he was found in this room alone with the necklace in his hands, wrapped in a handkerchief, the duplicate of which was in his bag, and that was open.

ISABEL. But he found the necklace in that bowl.

JERNIGAN (*looking at ISABEL*). Did you see him take it out ?

ISABEL. Of course I know that in your work you have to judge by external evidence, but in this case I am sure it has misled you. Captain Mowbray is an old friend of ours.

COLONEL JARDINE. Wait a minute, Isabel. This is certainly very strange.

ISABEL. But, father—you've known him for years.

COLONEL JARDINE. Yes, but—he's been at me just now, urging me with all his might to send you (*looking at JERNIGAN*) away and have no more enquiry.

JERNIGAN. H'm. That doesn't improve his case.

ISABEL. What motive could he have for stealing jewelry ? He's a rich man.

COLONEL JARDINE (*to ISABEL*). How did he become rich ?

ISABEL (*uncertainly*). Mining—didn't he ?

COLONEL JARDINE. I don't know. (*To JERNIGAN*.) A few years ago he had nothing. Then he went to

South Africa and came back rich. It was only yesterday afternoon he called himself an adventurer.

ISABEL. A good proof that he isn't one.

JERNIGAN. Mrs. Gorringe told me she knew something against him. When I questioned her, she refused to say what it was. But she admitted that since an interview she had with him last evening her opinion of him had undergone a change.

COLONEL JARDINE. She seemed very huffy with him just now.

ISABEL (*losing her temper*). Mrs. Gorringe is a fool.

COLONEL JARDINE. That's no way to argue, Isabel. You women are so emotional. You won't stop and reason.

JERNIGAN. Do you know when Captain Mowbray discovered you had a detective in the house?

COLONEL JARDINE. Yes, it was after dinner. I heard my wife tell him. And—yes—(*turns excitedly to JERNIGAN*) it was immediately after that I caught him escaping.

ISABEL (*with a smothered exclamation of indignation, which attracts their attention*). Oh!

COLONEL JARDINE (*turning to ISABEL*). Do you know why he wanted to leave in such a hurry—without a word to any of us?

ISABEL. No. But I think it's shameful to make such charges against a man like Captain Mowbray.

COLONEL JARDINE. I'm not going to make a charge against him.

ISABEL. Then you ought to, and give him a chance to clear himself.

COLONEL JARDINE. No, no. Better to hush it up. I don't want to do him any harm, and he'd find it very difficult to explain away so much evidence.

ISABEL. What's evidence when you *know* a man?

COLONEL JARDINE. You argue just like your mother.

ISABEL. Mother's going to discharge Pipkin. If only to stop that you ought to tell Captain Mowbray what you've been saying, and if *you* don't, *I* shall.

(MOWBRAY enters.)

COLONEL JARDINE (*nodding awkwardly and trying to appear friendly*). Hello, Mowbray. (Quickly, to JERNIGAN.) Now, if you're ready I'll show you round the place.

JERNIGAN (*rising, as he says aside to COLONEL JARDINE*). I should like to question you further about Captain Mowbray.

COLONEL JARDINE (*urging JERNIGAN towards the window*). Yes, outside. She'll get me into trouble with him if I stay here.

(COLONEL JARDINE and JERNIGAN *go out hurriedly into the garden.*)

ISABEL. Can you tell me why you wanted to leave us so suddenly last night?

MOWBRAY. Didn't you guess?

ISABEL (*innocently*). No.

MOWBRAY. Then I mustn't tell you.

ISABEL. I only ask you because—well, nobody seems to know—only they suspect—oh, dreadful things.

MOWBRAY. Who do?

ISABEL. Father and that detective. I may as well tell you at once. You know you went to father this morning and urged him to send the detective away, and you were found with the necklace last night, and so they think you— (Holds, not knowing how to express herself inoffensively.)

MOWBRAY (*looks at her, then says deliberately*). They think I stole it?

(ISABEL nods. He looks away from her slowly, stands still, looking very grave.)

ISABEL (*watches him anxiously before she says*). You know I don't believe a word of it.

MOWBRAY (*presses her hand gratefully, not looking at her as he says*). What do they say?

ISABEL. You know the way men argue.

MOWBRAY. Yes, yes!

ISABEL. They go by little bits of evidence—pocket-handkerchiefs and bags and things of that sort, instead of by what they know. They've piled up a whole mountain of what they call evidence—things you've said and done at different times, probably without thinking—and when I tell them it's all ridiculous, they call me emotional. Oh, I'm glad I'm not a man!

MOWBRAY. Are they going to take any sort of proceedings?

ISABEL. I don't know. But you will clear yourself, won't you?

MOWBRAY. I must.

ISABEL. I can't bear to hear such things said of you.

MOWBRAY. I will clear myself.

ISABEL. That's right. (*Moves away.*) Then there's another thing. (*He looks askance at her.*) Mother's going to discharge one of the maids.

MOWBRAY. Oh!

ISABEL. There's no evidence against her. It's all so silly. Father suspecting you, and mother, Pipkin. Aren't people dreadful?

(DAVID enters. ISABEL turns to him, smiling affectionately.)

ISABEL. Well, David, have you finished packing? (*Turns to MOWBRAY.*) Now, do go and see them. They are somewhere in the garden.

MOWBRAY (*quietly, but firmly*). I want to speak to David first.

ISABEL. No, afterwards. David and I haven't long to be together. He'll have to go to his train soon.

MOWBRAY. I must speak to David now.

DAVID. Won't it do afterwards, Frank?

MOWBRAY (*with authority*). No, now.

ISABEL (*impressed with the authority of his tone*). If it's so important. Don't keep him long.

(*Goes out.*)

MOWBRAY. Since you went out they've been trying again to solve the mystery of who stole the necklace.

DAVID (*trying to conceal his dismay*). I thought they were going to let it drop.

MOWBRAY. Mrs. Jardine is going to discharge one of the maids.

DAVID. Oh, I'm sorry.

MOWBRAY (*carelessly, to put him off his guard*). Why are you sorry?

DAVID. Well—if she's innocent.

MOWBRAY. I didn't say she was. (*Goes nearer to DAVID.*) I suppose you don't know if she's innocent or guilty?

DAVID. Of course not. How should I?

MOWBRAY. Then you couldn't be blamed for letting her go away with a ruined character?

DAVID (*uneasy under MOWBRAY's gaze*). Of course I couldn't. I say, you must excuse me. Isabel is waiting for me. (*Goes towards the door.*)

MOWBRAY. The Colonel suspects some one else.

DAVID (*stopping at the door*). Who ?

MOWBRAY. Me.

DAVID (*taken aback*). You ? But— (*coming towards MOWBRAY*) can't you clear yourself ?

MOWBRAY. How do you know I'm not guilty ?

DAVID. That's absurd.

MOWBRAY. You say you don't know how the necklace got in that bowl ?

DAVID. I said I didn't know it was there.

MOWBRAY. I did—according to circumstantial evidence. You'd think me rather a cad if I said nothing and let the poor girl be ruined—wouldn't you ?

DAVID (*reluctantly*). Yes.

MOWBRAY. When I saw you looking there—for matches— By the way, what did you want a match for ?

DAVID. To light my cigarette.

MOWBRAY. You hadn't got one.

DAVID. I was getting a match first.

MOWBRAY. I never heard of any one getting his match before he got his cigarette.

DAVID. I can't explain the reason for every little thing I do.

MOWBRAY (*assuming an easy manner, to put DAVID off his guard*). If they come and ask me awkward questions, I suppose you wouldn't mind me telling them why I looked in the bowl.

DAVID (*uneasily*). No—only— (*Pauses.*)

MOWBRAY. Only what ?

DAVID. I was only thinking it might make it look a bit queer for me.

MOWBRAY. Why ? Even if you'd been found with the necklace in your hands, as *I* was, you'd be beyond suspicion.

DAVID. Yes—I hope so.

MOWBRAY. Yes, because you left the house before it was last seen, and didn't come back till after it was stolen.

DAVID. Yes—I know.

MOWBRAY (*sternly*). You told me you were in the house yesterday afternoon when there was nobody about.

DAVID (*taken aback, but still trying to bluff*). Well ? That's no proof of anything.

MOWBRAY. I'm not going to have my character blackened for something I didn't do.

DAVID. But I shouldn't think they'll charge you with it ?

MOWBRAY. They'll gossip about it. I may have to bring an action for slander.

DAVID. I shouldn't do that.

MOWBRAY. You'll be abroad when I do.

DAVID. What have I got to do with it ?

MOWBRAY. I thought I might count on you to vouch for my good character.

DAVID. Yes—of course.

MOWBRAY. Then let us go out and see the detective now. (*Goes towards the window, then stops and turns to DAVID.*) Will you come ?

DAVID. No.

MOWBRAY. Why not ?

DAVID. You needn't take any notice of this. They won't do anything, and it'll all die down soon.

MOWBRAY (*looking steadily at DAVID*). Are you quite satisfied to have the maid discharged ?

DAVID (*losing his self-control*). Why do you look at me like that ? You keep your eyes on me every minute—as if you suspected me.

MOWBRAY. You've denied all knowledge of it.

DAVID. Isn't that enough ?

MOWBRAY. Have I always found you so truthful ? (*DAVID quails before him, then sinks into an arm-chair.*) David, if you confess to me now anything that incriminates you—I'll do what I can to shield you. Unless these charges increase till I'm forced to defend myself before the world, I'll take no notice of them, although Isabel has urged me to dispel them, and God knows what she'll think of me if I don't. Now, although they may have enough evidence to arrest me, they'll need a good deal more to convict me. This will be a big case,—the kind of case the whole country watches and reads about. You'll be drawn into it, because I shall be compelled to explain why I looked in that bowl. It will not be difficult to find witnesses to testify what train you came down by yesterday—not the one you said. It may not

be hard to find some one who saw you enter the house while we were all out, for I shall not scruple to say in my own defence that you had told me you were here then, knowing that if you are innocent you have nothing to fear. Then they'll look into our past lives—mine and yours. They'll examine your record to see if you have a reputation for truth and honesty—

DAVID (*completely breaking down*). Frank! Don't go on! I did it. Oh, why did you tell that story? It was that made me think of it—that story about a man who stole some diamonds and was never found out. It stuck in my mind so. I'd gone to pieces anyway. I'd been drinking and lost all my money—and I was so jealous of you and Isabel. When I came in yesterday I could see you both from my window—laughing together. When I came out of my room I passed Mrs. Gorringe's door. It was open a little way, and I remembered her saying how she left her things about, and that story about the man who was never found out came back and possessed me. When I pushed the door I could see the things lying there—and it seemed so easy. (*He covers his face with his hands, then proceeds more calmly.*) I came to my senses as soon as I saw you all. I thought I could get it back without any one knowing. I prayed for the chance to put it back. I promised Isabel I'd make a fresh start—and I will—I will,—if you won't tell.

MOWBRAY. I'll shield you on one condition. You must give up Isabel.

DAVID (*suddenly scared, says hurriedly*). I can't.

MOWBRAY. You can't marry her *now*.

DAVID. She won't know—no one will know.

MOWBRAY. That's not it. Whether you and I know or whether the whole world knows—you fell because you are dishonest. That is why you must give her up.

DAVID. I know I'm unworthy of her, but—I'm not all bad.

MOWBRAY. I know that. I don't ask you to be perfect. We all have our faults. But it isn't the number of his sins that mark a man—it's the kind.

DAVID (*humbly*). Don't you think—with this experience—I can be different?

MOWBRAY. The curse of degeneracy is always there,

in your mind and in your heart. It's like a taint in the blood. It warps your judgement, poisons your impulses, lures you into constant danger.

DAVID. But with Isabel to help me—

MOWBRAY. To help *you*—she—to give up *her* life to *you* who bring her only shame and sorrow—to expose *her* sweet nature day after day to *your* contamination—to make her the mother of *your* children. No, it's not to be thought of—you must not marry her.

DAVID. I can't give her up.

MOWBRAY. Then she must know the truth. If you don't break your engagement before you leave this house I shall tell her that—

ISABEL (*calls outside*). David !

(ISABEL enters. MOWBRAY breaks off suddenly in his sentence as she enters.)

MOWBRAY (*looks at ISABEL, then says to DAVID*). Tell her.

(MOWBRAY goes out into the garden.)

ISABEL. David, it's nearly time for you to go. (DAVID goes towards ISABEL, looks at her, breaks down and sinks on the sofa, sobbing. ISABEL comforts him.) Don't, dear, don't. We shan't be parted very long.

COLONEL JARDINE (*knocks on the door and calls without*). David ! It's time to go.

ISABEL. They're calling you.

COLONEL JARDINE (*knocking and calling as before*). You'll miss the train.

(ISABEL draws DAVID gently towards the door. He folds her in his arms in a long embrace.)

DAVID. Isabel !

ISABEL. Good-bye ! (He goes out; she goes towards the window, looking after him and crying.)

(MOWBRAY enters quietly. She does not see him.

He stands and watches her sorrowfully as she waves her handkerchief out of the window, trying to smile. She turns from the window and sees MOWBRAY.)

ISABEL (*drying her eyes*). I'm glad you know about David and me. I can talk to you about him. It's so terrible to say good-bye. (Dries her eyes and recovers her composure gradually.) But it's only for a little while. If they keep him long out there I shall go to join him.

(MOWBRAY *betrays increasing dismay as she continues.*) I feel content about him now. I think it's going to be all right.

(JERNIGAN enters, with an open letter in his hand.)

JERNIGAN. I've just received this letter from Mrs. Gorringe. She desires me to continue my investigation.

MOWBRAY (to JERNIGAN). I hear you have circumstantial evidence against me.

ISABEL. I'm glad you have this chance to clear yourself. (Goes towards the door.)

JERNIGAN (to ISABEL). Please don't go.

MOWBRAY. I don't wish to explain before her.

JERNIGAN. I need her evidence. (To ISABEL.) If this matter is brought into court you will be the most important witness. Please remember this, and answer me now as carefully as if you were on oath.

ISABEL. Yes.

JERNIGAN. What is your Christian name ?

ISABEL. Isabel.

JERNIGAN. Single ?

ISABEL. Married.

MOWBRAY (startled). Married ?

ISABEL. I was married this morning at the Registry Office to David Cairn.

JERNIGAN. Last evening when I came into this room and saw you receiving the stolen necklace from Captain Mowbray, did you see him take it from that bowl ?

ISABEL. No.

JERNIGAN. Thank you. (To MOWBRAY.) What is your explanation ?

MOWBRAY (looking at ISABEL). Married ! (To JERNIGAN.) I—can't explain—

JERNIGAN. I must press you to do so, or it will be my painful duty to take you into custody.

MOWBRAY (to himself). Married ! (Turns to JERNIGAN.) I decline to explain.

CURTAIN.

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE.—*The same as Acts I., II. and III. About one minute has elapsed since Act III.*

ISABEL is alone, distracted with anxiety. She draws her hand across her eyes, rings the bell, goes to the writing-table, sits and writes a note, places it in an envelope and seals it.

(CHARLES enters.)

ISABEL (addressing the envelope as she speaks). Take this to Mrs. Gorringe at once. She's at Miss Potts'—just over the way. (Gives the letter to CHARLES.)

CHARLES. Yes, miss.

(CHARLES goes out with the letter, holding the door open as he goes to allow COLONEL and MRS. JARDINE to enter. Their faces express solemn amazement.)

MRS. JARDINE. We've just heard. You could knock me down with a feather. (She looks at the others.) Hasn't any one anything to say?

COLONEL JARDINE (in a superior tone). I'm not as surprised as you are. I suspected it was Mowbray for some time.

MRS. JARDINE. You always did know beforehand—when it's all over. You weren't the only one who suspected, either. Don't you remember me saying the day he came, "There's something I don't like about that man's eyes"?

COLONEL JARDINE. No; I don't remember you saying anything of the kind.

MRS. JARDINE. Well, I thought it. I've heard of people entertaining angels unawares, but I never heard of any one entertaining a thief and a chemist's daughter unawares.

COLONEL JARDINE. I wonder what we'd better do?

MRS. JARDINE. There's nothing for *us* to do. I suppose Black Maria will call for him in the usual way.

ISABEL. Father, I've just sent a note to Mrs. Gorringe to ask her not to prosecute him.

COLONEL JARDINE. Do you think she won't want to now?

ISABEL. I hope she won't. We shall find out when she comes.

MRS. JARDINE. When who comes?

ISABEL. Mrs. Gorringe.

MRS. JARDINE. I'm not going to have that woman coming here.

ISABEL. Mother, this is no time to think about trifles.

MRS. JARDINE. Trifles! Do you call it a trifle when a shopkeeper's daughter insults your mother?

COLONEL JARDINE. My dear, you don't *know* that she's a shopkeeper's daughter.

MRS. JARDINE. You don't know what she isn't.

ISABEL. Captain Mowbray will be taken away by the detective directly. If you don't care about *him*, I suppose you don't want to be mixed up in a public scandal. It rests with Mrs. Gorringe to prevent that.

(CHARLES enters.)

CHARLES (announcing). Mrs. Gorringe.

MRS. JARDINE. Not at home.

(CHARLES turns to go.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Wait a minute, Charles. (Goes to his wife.) My dear, Mrs. Gorringe knows something else against Mowbray. Now we ought to find out what it is, so I think you'd better apologise.

MRS. JARDINE. I shall not apologise.

COLONEL JARDINE. We shall never find out what she knows if you don't.

MRS. JARDINE (after a moment's reflection says to CHARLES). At home.

(CHARLES goes out.)

COLONEL JARDINE. As it may be something of a private nature, I'll leave you and Isabel to get it out of her—

(COLONEL JARDINE goes out into the garden. Enter CHARLES.)

CHARLES. Mrs. Gorringe.

(MRS. GORRINGE enters, *a little nervous as to how she will be received. CHARLES goes out.*)

MRS. JARDINE (*meeting MRS. GORRINGE with great cordiality*). Dear Mrs. Gorringe, I told Isabel to ask you to come so that I might tell you how much I regret our quarrel.

MRS. GORRINGE. Dear Mrs. Jardine, it was all my fault.

MRS. JARDINE. No, no. *I* was entirely to blame.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, now, I won't hear you say that.

MRS. JARDINE. You must try to forgive me.

MRS. GORRINGE. Indeed, it is you who must try to forgive me, may I say Emily?

MRS. JARDINE. I wish you would—er—(*puzzles a moment.*) What's your name?

MRS. GORRINGE. Rose.

MRS. JARDINE. What a pretty name! (*Sits on the sofa, drawing MRS. GORRINGE down beside her.*) Now, Rosie—what's the other thing you know against this Captain Mowbray?

MRS. GORRINGE (*verging on a nervous breakdown throughout the scene*). I'll tell you presently.

ISABEL. Are you going to prosecute Captain Mowbray?

MRS. GORRINGE. I'll come to that directly. I can't tell you what I felt when I got Isabel's letter. My head all went dizzy and my heart fluttered like a bird.

MRS. JARDINE. You can't have been surprised to hear this man Mowbray had been arrested, after what you knew.

MRS. GORRINGE. I've hardly had time to realise if I was surprised or not. My knees are quivering like aspen leaves.

ISABEL. But you won't prosecute, will you?

MRS. GORRINGE. Give me a little time to get over the shock. I was in a state of palpitation anyway,—after the words we had. (*MRS. JARDINE pats MRS. GORRINGE forgivingly.*) I'd run all the way to Miss Potts's—perhaps not quite *all* the way—but most of the way—in nothing but my house-shoes and a hat. Oh, dear! It's beginning again. (*Puts her hand to her heart and closes her eyes.*)

ISABEL. The salts. (*Takes a bottle of salts from a table.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*recovers in a moment and goes on volubly*). When I got to Miss Potts's I rang the bell. Jane came to the door, or was it Minnie ? My head's going round and round so I can't even remember who came to the door.

ISABEL (*exasperated*). Never mind who came to the door.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, don't say that, Isabel. My nerves are so upset. There ! You've made it begin again. (*Closes her eyes and lays her hand on her heart.*)

MRS. JARDINE. We shall never find out what Mowbray did, at this rate.

(ISABEL *applies the salts to MRS. GORRINGE'S nose so suddenly that MRS. GORRINGE screams.*)

MRS. GORRINGE. Thank you, dear. I believe I should have swooned if I hadn't had that sniff.

MRS. JARDINE. Now, tell us about Mowbray.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. Where was I ? Oh. After I'd written that letter to Mr. Jernigan we went upstairs.

MRS. JARDINE. Who ? You and Mowbray ?

MRS. GORRINGE. No. Miss Potts and I. Miss Potts poured out some water and said, "There, dear, bathe your eyes." And I said, "Thank you, dear, and if you could lend me a comb I should be so grateful, as I've brought nothing with me."

ISABEL (*exasperated*). Mrs. Gorringe !

MRS. GORRINGE. Don't interrupt me, dear ; I shall lose the thread.

ISABEL. There's no time to waste. Are you going to prosecute or are you not ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Now I've lost it. I don't know where I was.

MRS. JARDINE. You were in Miss Potts's bedroom.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. And while I was trying to make myself fit to be seen—all of a sudden—

MRS. JARDINE. Mowbray came in.

MRS. GORRINGE. No—not Mowbray.

MRS. JARDINE (*exasperated*). Well, where does Mowbray come in ?

MRS. GORRINGE. I'll tell you presently. I can't speak more than one word at once. Minnie or Jane, or

whichever of them it was, came in with Isabel's letter. I can't tell you what I felt. My head went all dizzy and my heart fluttered like a bird.

MRS. JARDINE. Yes, yes— (*losing her temper*) and your knees quivered like aspen leaves. Oh—

(*Moves away from MRS. GORRINGE.*)

ISABEL. I'll get the detective to her.

(*ISABEL goes out quickly.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*looking after ISABEL*). I'm afraid Isabel doesn't like me. (*Rising.*) I really must go to the chemist and get a nerve tonic.

MRS. JARDINE (*pricking up her ears*). The chemist?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes. I wonder which is the best one to go to.

MRS. JARDINE. I should have thought *you* could tell *me* that.

MRS. GORRINGE. Why?

MRS. JARDINE. Never mind the chemist; let us prepare a little statement for the detective. (*Sits at the writing-table, takes a pen and paper.*)

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, no, no. If I have to undergo any more of those searching questions, I shall lose my reason.

MRS. JARDINE. It won't take long. (*Writing as she speaks.*) Birthplace Ipswich. (*Turns to MRS. GORRINGE.*) Father's name?

MRS. GORRINGE. Arnold Pilkington.

MRS. JARDINE. Occupation? (*Looks searchingly at MRS. GORRINGE.*)

MRS. GORRINGE (*losing her head*). What do they call them?—Che—Che—

MRS. JARDINE. Chemist?

MRS. GORRINGE (*on her dignity*). No. County Councillor. Papa's the Mayor of Ipswich.

(*ISABEL enters, followed by JERNIGAN. About the same time, COLONEL JARDINE enters from the garden.*)

ISABEL (*to MRS. GORRINGE*). Please tell Mr. Jernigan if you intend to prosecute or not.

MRS. GORRINGE. Of course I don't want any one to go to prison.

ISABEL (*to JERNIGAN*). There! You see! She won't!

JERNIGAN (*to MRS. GORRINGE*). In your letter you instructed me to arrest whomever I suspected.

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes—because—*(laughing as she goes towards MRS. JARDINE)* You know you said they suspected *you*.

MRS. JARDINE (*indignantly*). Me ? What next !

MRS. GORRINGE (*laughing as she explains to JERNIGAN*). I ought to tell you that Mrs. Jardine and I had a tiff this morning, and—well, I was so put out I felt ready to do anything to annoy her. *(Turns to MRS. JARDINE. They laugh together. MRS. JARDINE's laughter is a good deal forced.)*

JERNIGAN. This question of prosecution doesn't affect Mrs. Jardine, but Captain Mowbray.

MRS. GORRINGE. Ah ! He was very rude to me.

MRS. JARDINE (*eagerly*). Ask her what he did, Mr. Jernigan.

JERNIGAN. What is it you know against him ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Well—we were standing about there —no, there. *(Points to the carpet near her feet.)*

MRS. JARDINE. Who ? You and Miss Potts ?

MRS. GORRINGE. No. Captain Mowbray and I.

MRS. JARDINE. We've come to Mowbray at last.

COLONEL JARDINE. Don't interrupt her. Now, what did he say ?

MRS. GORRINGE. You promise you won't tell Mr. Gorringe ?

MRS. JARDINE (*wheedling MRS. GORRINGE*). Now, Rosic—trust Emily.

(MRS. GORRINGE pats MRS. JARDINE on the cheek.)

MRS. JARDINE is intensely annoyed by this familiarity.)

MRS. GORRINGE. Well—

COLONEL JARDINE. Out with it. We're all waiting to hear what he said.

MRS. GORRINGE. I don't remember what *he* said, but *I* said—

OMNES. Yes—yes—well ?

MRS. GORRINGE. "I hope I shall never forget my duty to Mr. Gorringe and the children."

(Draws herself up and looks round at the others, very well satisfied with herself.)

MRS. JARDINE (*eagerly*). What had he done ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Nothing.

MRS. JARDINE. Well—what *did* he do ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Nothing.

MRS. JARDINE. Is that the whole story ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Yes.

MRS. JARDINE (*turning angrily from MRS. GORRINGE, and marching towards her husband*). And you made me apologise to her to hear that.

(*All their backs are turned to MRS. GORRINGE, but she does not perceive this as she rambles on.*)

MRS. GORRINGE. That shows you the kind of a man he is—— He's the sort of man to lead a woman on and make her say things that—well, I don't think I know you well enough to explain—— (*She looks at the others and sees that no one is paying any attention to her.*) If you've all done with me, I'll go.

COLONEL JARDINE. Don't go, Mrs. Gorringe. Now that you and Emily have kissed and made friends, why don't you stay and finish your visit ?

MRS. JARDINE (*pulls the Colonel's coat-tails, as she interposes herself between him and MRS. GORRINGE*). Christopher ! How inconsiderate of you ! Of course, dear Rosie, we should love to have you with us, but I'm sure you'd have hysterics all night long in that room.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, I know I should. Did I ever tell you how I came in and closed the door ? It's as if the dressing-table were there— (*Points to the window.*) No, there. (*Points somewhere else.*) And the door— (*Coming towards the door.*)

COLONEL and MRS. JARDINE (*quickly, together*). Yes, you showed us.

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, of course. You were in the room when I was telling Mr. Jernigan. Good-bye. (*Shakes hands with MRS. JARDINE.*)

MRS. JARDINE. Good-bye.

MRS. GORRINGE. Good-bye. (*Shakes hands with COLONEL JARDINE.*)

COLONEL JARDINE. Good-bye.

ISABEL. Are you going back to Miss Potts ?

MRS. GORRINGE. Oh, no, dear. I'm going back to Mr. Gorringe and the children.

(*MRS. GORRINGE goes out.*)

MRS. JARDINE. Come, Christopher, let us speed the parting guest.

(MRS. JARDINE goes out after MRS. GORRINGE.)

COLONEL JARDINE. Certainly. You always were a model hostess.

(COLONEL JARDINE goes out after MRS. JARDINE and MRS. GORRINGE.)

JERNIGAN. I must go back to Captain Mowbray.

ISABEL. As Mrs. Gorringe knows nothing against him, and won't prosecute—you can release him, can't you?

JERNIGAN. If she won't prosecute—I must.

ISABEL. Oh, no.

JERNIGAN. I believe a felony has been committed. Captain Mowbray has practically confessed. It is my duty to arrest him.

ISABEL. But you'll ruin him—you will, indeed. I know he didn't do it. The necklace is found. There's no harm done.

JERNIGAN (*unmoved, but not harshly*). My work accustoms me to scenes like this. I have seen so many women weep and pray for mercy that I have become hardened. (*Turns to the door*.)

ISABEL (*quietly*). I would like to speak to him before you go—only a few words, but alone. Please don't refuse me that. It's only to say good-bye.

JERNIGAN. It's a violation of my duty, but I feel I can trust you.

(JERNIGAN goes out.)

ISABEL. What *can* we do? (*Enter CAPTAIN MOWBRAY*.) I'm so sure this is all a mistake. Can't you tell me? I'll keep your secret.

MOWBRAY. It's best as it is.

ISABEL. But if they send you to prison. Oh, think—(*She is overcome with emotion*.)

MOWBRAY. They won't send me to prison. There'll be a trial, most likely, but I think I shall get off.

ISABEL. Then you admit it's a mistake?

MOWBRAY (*momentarily confused*). I—I— You said yesterday you trusted me.

ISABEL. More than any man.

MOWBRAY. Then—trust me still.

ISABEL. I do. But you leave me so in the dark. I thought you'd explain it to *me*,—just *me*. (*He turns*

silently away.) If you can't— (Giving vent to her emotion.) Oh, I can't bear it. To see you taken away like a criminal—if they'd only take me instead of you! If only I could bear the shame we've somehow brought on you to-day— (Falters.) My wedding-day. (Breaks down.)

MOWBRAY (*comes towards her, speaking tenderly and sorrowfully*). Yes, poor child, your wedding-day, but brighter days will come, and soon you'll forget that your wedding-bells never rang.

ISABEL (*brokenly*). It isn't *that* I care about.

MOWBRAY. No. I know, but *I'd* pictured your wedding-day so differently.

ISABEL. You know why I married David,—you, only *you*. You know I don't regret it, and I think he's going to turn out well now. But I can't realise that we are married. We spoke a few hurried words in the Registry Office—that was all. It hasn't made any difference to me yet. And David isn't in danger and you are. I must place you first now. (*Seeing his emotion as she looks into his eyes*.) Do I make it harder for you?

MOWBRAY (*with exaltation*). No—no—so much easier.

ISABEL (*innocently*). How can *I* make it easier?

MOWBRAY. Because whatever my life is now—and it's likely to be lonely—I shall always remember that for one moment you placed me first in yours.

ISABEL (*innocently, putting her face near to his*). Will that make it easier?

MOWBRAY (*looks into her face, then draws back suddenly*). Don't tempt me. You know what I mean. I've wasted the best years of my life—an exile—working to grow rich—for you. And then—when I thought I'd won you—to see you snatched from me—by a boy. (*She turns away.*) Forgive me. Don't make me feel ashamed of myself. (*She gives him her hands.*) If ever we meet again we shall both be loyal to David. And if we never meet—perhaps the pain will grow less in time—and I shall be glad to think you know how sweet your memory will be to me. I shall often see your kind eyes smiling—and hear your voice,—Good-bye.

ISABEL. Good-bye.

(ISABEL goes out slowly, closing the door after her.)

DAVID *enters suddenly from the garden. His face is drawn and white. He seems on the verge of nervous prostration.*)

DAVID. Frank !

MOWBRAY. David !

DAVID. You mustn't do this for me.

MOWBRAY. Why are you here ?

DAVID. To give myself up.

MOWBRAY. How did you hear about it ?

DAVID. The servant said you'd been arrested.

MOWBRAY. But why did you come ?

DAVID. Because I'm not fit to be in the army. I'm not fit to look the other fellows in the face. I thought they could all see it in *my* face. Isn't it there ? Can't every one see it ?

MOWBRAY (*laying his hand firmly on DAVID*). David, you've got to think of Isabel.

DAVID. Isabel ! (*Sinks into a chair sobbing.*)

MOWBRAY (*firmly*). Pull yourself together, man. She mustn't see this.

DAVID. She's got to know the truth.

MOWBRAY. She must never know it. Forget the past.

DAVID. I can't.

MOWBRAY. You must. Brand yourself, you dis honour her. Think what that means, some of her friends shunning her, some pitying her—all humiliating her. If you confess now, she will have to live in the glare of your crime. Don't bring her to that. Think man, think— Grip hold of yourself and think.

DAVID. I can't let you suffer for me.

MOWBRAY. Don't think of me. Think of the girl you married this morning. She placed all her life in your keeping. Oh, take care of it, take care of it.

DAVID. It's too late.

MOWBRAY. It's not too late. You're a boy yet. You've made a bad start, but you can get over that. Begin again, your life is before you. The past is only to warn you, not to make you despair. Begin again ; say, "*I will conquer*," and you can. No man succeeds by accident. It's by faith and self-control, and hard work, and it's worth it. It's worth everything to be your own master and not your own slave. Begin again

at once, and don't delay. That's why people fail, because they put off making that first big effort. Make yours now. Be strong. (DAVID *breaks down*.) She mustn't see you like this; I'll detain her while you pull yourself together. Look forward, lad—there's always hope ahead. You repent, there's hope in that, and you're not going out alone, you're going to face the world with a true woman. And with youth, and hope and faith, and Isabel—why, damn it, you can triumph over everything.

(MOWBRAY *goes out*.)

DAVID (*hopelessly*). The curse is always there in my mind and heart. I'm tainted— Oh! Isabel! (Rises with determination.) I won't bring her dishonour, I'll set her free. There's only one way—I'll do it—I'll do it. (Goes to the writing-table, sits down, and writes a letter in feverish haste. His voice breaks as he says.) And now, good-bye—Isabel. Good-bye. (Puts the letter in the envelope, addresses it.) For Isabel.

(CHARLES enters as if looking for some one.)

DAVID. Who are you looking for?

CHARLES. Miss Isabel, sir.

DAVID. Here. (CHARLES comes to DAVID, who hands him the letter.) Give her that—in five minutes.

CHARLES (*takes the letter*). I'll give it to her now, sir.

DAVID (*angrily*). Not now. Have you no sense?

CHARLES. Beg pardon, sir. In five minutes. (Turns to the door.)

DAVID. Charles. (CHARLES comes to him.) I didn't mean to speak angrily to you. I mean,—I don't want those to be my last words. Here— (Feels in his pockets, takes out some coins and gives them to CHARLES.)

CHARLES (*taking the money*). Thank you, sir.

DAVID (*puts his hand on CHARLES' shoulder as he speaks*). Don't make a mess of your life, Charles.

(CHARLES goes out and closes the door. DAVID takes a revolver from his pocket, examines it, then goes out into the garden. Enter ISABEL and CAPTAIN MOWBRAY.)

ISABEL. I thought you said David was here.

MOWBRAY. I left him here.

(ISABEL rings the bell.)

ISABEL. But why should he come back?

MOWBRAY. He's awfully broken up about me.

ISABEL. How could he know? It all happened after he left.

MOWBRAY. He knew the suspicion was on me.

ISABEL (*as if struck by an inspiration*). Oh! (*Goes quickly to MOWBRAY.*) Are you doing this to shield—anybody?

(CHARLES enters, holding the letter.)

MOWBRAY. Where is Mr. Cairn?

CHARLES. He was here just now.

MOWBRAY. Did he say anything about going away?

CHARLES. No, sir.

ISABEL (*noticing the letter in CHARLES' hand*). What's that letter?

CHARLES. He said I wasn't to give it you for five minutes. It must be five minutes now. (*Hands the letter to ISABEL.*)

(CHARLES goes out.)

MOWBRAY (*trying to stop her opening it*). Don't read it!

ISABEL. I must.

MOWBRAY. No.

ISABEL. Yes, I begin to see. (*Opens the letter and reads aloud.*) "I stole the necklace when you were all out yesterday afternoon— If you don't believe this, I daresay you can find out at the station what train I came by—when I came to the house about three o'clock, the gardener saw me." (*Her face expresses horror. Then she looks up and says firmly.*) They must all see this.

MOWBRAY. No, destroy it.

ISABEL. Oh, how could he let you take it on yourself?

MOWBRAY. I made him do it. I shall get off all right, but he wouldn't. He'd be ruined. (*Trying to take the letter from her.*) Destroy it.

ISABEL. Wait. There's more yet. (*Turns over the page and reads.*) "Frank loves you—" (*Stops short, reading the rest to herself, her horror giving way to alarm.*) Oh! (*Drops the letter.*)

(MOWBRAY picks it up and reads it.)

MOWBRAY. "Frank loves you. I hope you will marry him some day. When you get this letter you will be free, so it will be no use to try and stop me. I know

now that you will only find happiness after my death." (Runs to the window. JERNIGAN meets MOWBRAY at the window and whispers to him.) Dead !! (JERNIGAN disappears.) Oh, poor David !

CURTAIN.

COUSIN KATE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

COPY OF THE "FIRST NIGHT" PROGRAMME
AT THE
HAYMARKET THEATRE, LONDON

COUSIN KATE
A NEW COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

PERFORMED FOR THE FIRST TIME
ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 18, 1903

<i>Heath Desmond</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MR. CYRIL MAUDE
<i>Rev. James Bartlett</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MR. RUDGE HARDING
<i>Bobby Spencer</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MASTER CYRIL SMITH
<i>Mrs. Spencer</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MISS CARLOTTA ADDISON
<i>Amy Spencer</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MISS BEATRICE FERRAR
<i>Jane</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MISS PAMELA GAYTHORNE
<i>Kate Curtis</i>	.	.	.	.	.	MISS ELLIS JEFFREYS

*The action takes place in a rural district of England, and covers
a period of about five hours*

Acts I. & III.—Drawing-room at Mrs. Spencer's *Walter Hann*

Act II.—The Sitting-room at "Owlscot" *Walter Hann*

COUSIN KATE

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE.—*A drawing-room at MRS. SPENCER'S. There is a door on the left-hand side and a French window opposite the audience. It is a cheerful room, used as a general sitting-room, with simple and rather old-fashioned furniture. The window is wide open and shows a pretty country garden in mid-summer. There is a large oval table near the centre, with books and a bowl of flowers upon it. A writing-table against the wall near the door. A sofa, several chairs and other suitable furniture to complete scene; pictures and brackets on the wall. A picture over the writing-table represents a girl feeding pigeons.*

MRS. SPENCER is seated on the sofa, sewing, with a capacious work-basket by her side. She is a middle-aged widow, a gentlewoman who has always lived in the country and is unsophisticated in the ways of the world. By nature she is soft and affectionate, tactless, and with no force of character. She is well, but not stylishly, dressed.

AMY SPENCER, her daughter, is seated in an armchair doing nothing. She is a pretty girl of twenty, well, but plainly, dressed. She is a serious girl, practical and without imagination or humour; very honestly trying to do her duty—always very sincere and unaffected.

BOBBY SPENCER, Amy's brother, a boy of fourteen, is seated at the table reading; his book and elbows are on the table and his head clasped between his hands. He wears a flannel shirt and trousers, a dark coat and canvas shoes.

From the serious demeanour of the Spencers when the curtain rises, it is evident that something is weighing heavily upon them. AMY listlessly turns her engagement ring round on her finger, then takes it off and examines it, without noticing the others. When she takes it off, MRS. SPENCER watches her furtively over her work, and BOBBY steals a glance at her. AMY replaces the ring. MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY continue sewing and reading. AMY rises, goes to the window and looks off. As soon as AMY'S back is turned, MRS. SPENCER drops her work and watches her. BOBBY also looks up from his book and watches her; then MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY look at each other. AMY turns from the window and glances at the others, who continue sewing and reading and pretend not to be watching her. AMY goes out and closes the door. As soon as she has gone, MRS. SPENCER lays her work down beside her, takes out her handkerchief and dries her eyes. BOBBY pushes his book away and leans back in his chair.

MRS. SPENCER. Poor Amy!

BOBBY. I'd like to kill him.

MRS. SPENCER. He may have had some good reason for going away. I try to believe so.

BOBBY. But wouldn't he have told her if he had, instead of leaving her like this without a word? He's had two days to tell her in. We may as well make up our minds that he's gone for good.

MRS. SPENCER (*with a fresh burst of tears*). Oh, it's terrible to see her going about the house so pale and quiet. If she'd only talk about it, but she won't. She feels the humiliation so. (*Wipes her eyes*.)

BOBBY. I can't help thinking I ought to do something!

MRS. SPENCER (*sorrowfully*). What could you do?

BOBBY. If I knew where he was, I might go for him. Of course, he could lick me, but I might land him a punch or two on his beastly jaw first—and that 'ud be somethin'! (*Gloomily.*) It's sittin' still and doin' nothin' that's so awful. I ought to be doin' somethin'—because—well—I'm the only man in our family.

(*There is a knock on the door; MRS. SPENCER*

quickly resumes her work, trying to look composed.)

MRS. SPENCER. Come in.

(JANE, a country servant maid, with a perpetual grin, enters with a parcel.)

JANE. Is Miss Amy 'ere ?

MRS. SPENCER. She just went out. What have you there, Jane ?

JANE. I think it's another wedding present, mum. Miss 'Orner left it.

MRS. SPENCER. Miss Horner ?

JANE. The 'ousemaid at Darbisher's, mum.

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, from Mrs. Darbisher. Please put it on the table.

JANE. Yes, mum. (Lays the parcel on the table.)

MRS. SPENCER (as JANE goes to the door). Don't disturb Miss Amy. I'll tell her.

JANE. Yes, mum.

(JANE goes out; MRS. SPENCER goes to the table, takes up the parcel and looks at it.)

MRS. SPENCER. I'd better put it where Amy won't see it. (Puts the parcel in a drawer of the writing-table.) I don't think Jane knows yet that there's anything the matter.

BOBBY (watching his mother). We might as well tell everybody. He won't come back, and it might stop the presents comin'. (Nearly crying.) I can't bear it when the presents come. (Turns quickly to window to hide his emotion. MRS. SPENCER goes back to the sofa and resumes her sewing.)

MRS. SPENCER. It'll be better when Cousin Kate comes.

BOBBY. What can *she* do ?

MRS. SPENCER. I don't know, but I always have a feeling that things will be better when Cousin Kate comes.

BOBBY (going nearer to the window as if he sees some one approaching). Here's Mr. Bartlett. (Turns to his mother.) Shall I go and say you won't see him ?

MRS. SPENCER (dropping her work). No, I asked him to call.

BOBBY. Are you goin' to tell him ?

MRS. SPENCER. Yes, I must. You see, he's going on

with the arrangements at the church. (*There is a knock at the door.*) Come in.

(JANE enters.)

JANE. Mr. Bartlett, mum.

(MRS. SPENCER places her work and basket on the table. THE REV. JAMES BARTLETT, a serious young Anglican clergyman, enters. He is about thirty-five, rather stiff, and pompous, and always very much in earnest. His oratorical and platitudinous style of talking has become natural through habit. He quite sincerely does what he thinks is right, but he can't see through himself. He always employs a genial manner in greeting people, but geniality is not natural to him.)

BARTLETT. Good afternoon, Mrs. Spencer. (*He shakes hands with her.*)

(JANE goes out. BOBBY shakes hands with MR. BARTLETT.)

BOBBY (*lugubriously*). How d'you do, Mr. Bartlett?

BARTLETT (*in his genial manner—patting BOBBY on the back*). Well, Robert, how are the holiday tasks going?

BOBBY. Not very well.

BARTLETT. Too much cricket, eh?

BOBBY (*with a sigh*). No—it isn't that. (*Turns away.*)

(MR. BARTLETT seats himself in an armchair and addresses MRS. SPENCER.)

BARTLETT. We've just been practising the wedding hymn. The boys really give a capital rendering of "The voice that breathed o'er Eden."

MRS. SPENCER (*embarrassed, trying to control her emotion*; BOBBY *watching her*). Mr. Bartlett, we are in great trouble. (*She pauses, BARTLETT instantly drops the genial manner and leans forward in the attitude of professional sympathiser.*) Amy will not be married the day after to-morrow. (*Beginning to weep.*) Mr. Desmond has gone away. (*She pauses to wipe her eyes before proceeding.*)

BARTLETT (*not quite understanding*). Gone away?

BOBBY (*bitterly*). He's jilted her—the cad.

BARTLETT (*sincerely but professionally to MRS.*

SPENCER). May I say that I sympathise with you most deeply in this visitation ?

MRS. SPENCER (*recovering herself*). Thank you. I was sure you would. I don't know what to think of it all. Mr. Desmond was here as usual on Sunday evening, and he said nothing about going away, but when Bobby went round to his lodgings on Monday morning, they told him he had packed his things and gone.

BARTLETT. He sent you no explanation ?

MRS. SPENCER. No—and he left no address.

BARTLETT. Have you taken any steps to find out where he went ?

MRS. SPENCER. No. I thought it would hardly become us to go after him if he wishes to leave us. Perhaps I was wrong. I don't know what to do. I'm afraid we are rather a helpless little family ; but we've never had to face anything like this before. (*Dries her eyes again.*)

BARTLETT. Let us hope that though your way now seems so dark it may ultimately prove to be all for the best.

MRS. SPENCER. Yes, but two days before the wedding— (*Weeps again.*)

BOBBY (*sorrowfully*). She's got her dress and veil and everythin', and the cake came this morning.

MRS. SPENCER. Their home is almost ready for them. He wouldn't go away now if he meant to marry Amy.

BARTLETT. It's very lamentable—*very* lamentable.

MRS. SPENCER (*cheering up a bit*). It will be better when Cousin Kate comes.

BOBBY. Mr. Bartlett doesn't know who Cousin Kate is, mother.

MRS. SPENCER. My cousin, Miss Curtis. She is coming on a visit. She was coming to the wedding. She doesn't know yet—of course. We are all very fond of her, and she's seen us through many a trouble. When my dear husband died, and Amy and I were prostrate with grief, she came and did everything for us. I don't know what we should do without Cousin Kate.

BOBBY. She lives in London. She writes novels.

MRS. SPENCER. I think you told me that you had read some of her books.

BARTLETT (*stiffening with disapprobation*). I have.

MRS. SPENCER (*simply*). She isn't at all like her books. She's very nice.

BOBBY. Yes, she's jolly. She used to play cricket with me when I was a kid.

MRS. SPENCER. She's been like an elder sister to these children—and to me too. (*Observing BARTLETT'S stiff attitude*.) I'm afraid you don't approve of her books, by your face.

BARTLETT. I found her cynical attitude towards love and marriage very distressing.

MRS. SPENCER. I don't pretend to be a critic, and I couldn't make head or tail of Kate's last book, but no one could help loving *her*. She is so unselfish and affectionate—wayward and impulsive too. When she was younger I was afraid she might do something imprudent. I could so easily imagine her eloping or going upon the stage. But she'll be a great help now. (*AMY enters*.) She's devoted to Amy. (*Sees AMY*.) Oh, dear, here's Mr. Bartlett.

(*AMY goes to MR. BARTLETT, who rises and shakes hands with her. MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY both watch her anxiously. She is very composed*.)

AMY. Bobby, I think it's time you went to meet Cousin Kate.

BOBBY (*looking sorrowfully at AMY*). Yes, I'll go.

(*BOBBY goes out*.)

AMY (*to MRS. SPENCER*). Aren't you going to the Mothers' Meeting?

MRS. SPENCER (*rising*). Perhaps I'd better. I suppose they'd wonder if I didn't come.

AMY. I think there is no need for us to neglect our duties.

MRS. SPENCER. No, dear, I'll just go and put in an appearance, any way, and if Cousin Kate comes before I'm back you can look after her—can't you? You'll excuse me, won't you, Mr. Bartlett?

(*MR. BARTLETT opens the door for MRS. SPENCER. She looks at AMY, hesitates, then goes to her and kisses her emotionally. AMY receives the kiss kindly but undemonstratively. MRS. SPENCER goes out, wiping her eyes. MR. BARTLETT closes the door after her*.)

BARTLETT (*impressively*). Oh, if only there were more Christian women like you, Miss Spencer.

AMY (*turns to him a little surprised*). Like me?

BARTLETT. More who place their duties before their pleasures or—what is even rarer, before their griefs.

AMY. I want to do my duty, but sometimes it is very hard even to know what it is.

BARTLETT. Be patient, and be assured that everything will be made plain.

AMY. I *am* patient, but everything is *not* made plain. I know it is rebellious of me to speak so, but I think you understand a Christian's difficulties better than most people do. Our own vicar is very good, of course—but he is so old, I suppose he can't understand a young person's temptations very well, and since you came here to take his place you have so often helped me. You say things that seem to be meant specially for me.

BARTLETT. I am very grateful if I have been the instrument chosen to bring the truth home to you.

AMY. You preached two Sundays ago against the danger of yoking ourselves with unbelievers. Did you mean wicked people—like atheists—or just flighty people—like—like—

BARTLETT. The Irish. (AMY *drops her eyes*.) I am afraid there is not a very wide difference between the two states. Flightiness is the forerunner of crime.

AMY. Oh, but with a person to whom crime is out of the question—a person who doesn't trouble much about going to church, but who is always good and kind?

BARTLETT. That is not a very easy question to decide offhand.

AMY. It is a question *I* have to decide. I know I am weak and inexperienced, but I do want to do what is right, and I want to do right by other people, too. It isn't always easy to do both.

BARTLETT. Do you find it impossible to fulfil your duties towards others, and at the same time to follow the dictates of your own conscience?

AMY (*simply*). I don't know till I try. I suppose I ought to be wise enough to settle my own difficulties, but you see I'm not. (*Sits on the sofa*.)

BARTLETT (*speaking more earnestly than he has yet*

done). If you were free from all obligations, would you be able to perform your duties better singly, or yoked with one whose aims were the same as your own, whose loving interest would support, not hinder you, in your life's work ? *(Sits beside her.)*

AMY (*looking on the ground*). I think I could do more good with some one to guide me. *(Looks up at him.)* I suppose that's very weak ?

BARTLETT. No, no. *(He looks into her eyes. She turns them away embarrassed.)* It is a divine ordinance that each should have a loving helpmeet to assist and cheer him on this earthly pilgrimage. *(He bends towards her, speaking like a lover.)* Miss Spence—Amy—

(There is a knock on the door. AMY rises abruptly.)

JANE *(bursts in.)*

JANE *(excitedly).* She's coming.

AMY *(to MR. BARTLETT).* It's Cousin Kate.

JANE. She's not here yet, Miss, but I see the eab go round the corner, and it's her box—the same she had last time.

(JANE goes out.)

AMY *(constrained as she turns to MR. BARTLETT).* Will you stay and meet her ?

BARTLETT. I think not. May I come and renew this conversation another time ?

AMY. We shall be very pleased to see you if you care to come *(pauses, then says hurriedly)* to supper this evening.

BARTLETT. Thank you. I will come.

(MR. BARTLETT goes out.)

(Enter COUSIN KATE. She is a charming, humorous, high-spirited, affectionate woman of twenty-nine. She knows the world, and her experience has only matured, not embittered her. She is devoted to the Spencers ; their simplicity appeals to her heart, and she feels as if she were their guardian—a position they very willingly grant her. She is charmingly dressed. She carries a small bag in one hand, an umbrella and sun-shade closed in the other, and a light dust-coat over one arm. As she is passing the window she sees AMY, stops, and enters by the window.)

KATE. Here you are. *(Swoops upon AMY, embraces*

her with her arms full, and kisses her on each cheek.) I'm so glad to see you. (*She turns to deposit her things on the table; AMY helps her.*) Oh, my dear, I've had such an adventure in the train.

AMY (apprehensively). What—an accident?

KATE. No—a man.

AMY. Did he speak to you?

KATE (demurely as she draws off her gloves). Yes—he spoke to me.

AMY. How dreadful! It's getting worse and worse on this line. Florrie Cutler told me the most awful experience she had the other day. I think the man put his feet up and whistled,—and when she looked at him he winked. (*Looks at KATE, who is wrestling with her gloves.*) I can see you are all in a flutter. (*KATE smiles at her.*) Did he go far?

KATE. All the way.

(AMY opens her mouth and eyes in surprise.)

KATE. Yes. He got out at this station.

AMY (relieved). Oh, I meant did he do more than just speak?

KATE. He laughed and— (*AMY looks horrified.* KATE smiles at her as she throws her gloves on the table.) My dear, he was perfectly charming.

AMY (shocked). Oh, Cousin Kate!

KATE (demurely). How's your mother?

AMY. She's quite well. But how did you get into conversation with him?

KATE. The usual way. He asked me if I'd like the window up or down. I said "up" . . . or was it "down"? Anyhow I said I'd have it the way it wasn't. You know he wasn't at all like a man in a train. Generally I accept the window up or down and refuse the newspaper, but he offered his so charmingly—a little shyly, but not at all clumsily. He was so nice.

AMY (thoughtfully). I suppose there is no harm in accepting a newspaper from a fellow traveller.

KATE. Of course not.

AMY. If one isn't a very young woman.

KATE (turns suddenly on AMY, protesting good-humouredly). Oh, Amy, you demon!

AMY (afraid she has hurt KATE's feelings). Oh, I don't mean—

KATE. You mean *me*. (*Smiling.*) But I don't mind, because a *very* young woman wouldn't know the sort of man she has to snub from the sort it's safe to be nice to. (*Folds her hands in mock resignation.*) Old age has its compensations.

AMY. Of course you merely returned his paper with a word of thanks.

KATE. Er—er— How's Bobby? (*She wanders about looking at things.*)

AMY. He went to the station to meet you.

KATE. Did he? I didn't see him. But I was in such a state.

AMY (*innocently*). Were you? Why?

KATE. Oh, with my luggage, of course. I leapt into a cab and flew up here without saying good-bye.

AMY. Good-bye? Who came with you?

KATE (*darting an impatient look at AMY.*) Oh, Amy! (*Stops in front of the picture.*) What a pretty picture! It's new since I was here. (*Goes closer to it as if to examine it carefully.*) A girl feeding pigeons—very nice.

AMY (*puzzling*). Oh, I see—without saying good-bye to the man who lent you the newspaper. Who was he?

KATE (*still regarding the picture*). I don't know. I never saw him before. (*Slowly—almost with a sigh.*) I shall never see him again. (*Pauses, gazing in front of her, but not at the picture. Blinks her eyes and turns round quickly, speaking more to herself than AMY.*) Of course I shall never see him again. What am I thinking of?

AMY. But you say he got out here.

KATE. If I happened to meet him—I daresay I might—bow to him. I suppose I could do that without behaving like a servant?

AMY. I wonder if I know him. I know every one about here by sight. What was he like?

KATE. Sunshine.

AMY. Tall or short?

KATE. Just right—not too anything.

AMY. What was it that attracted you so greatly to him?

KATE. I don't know; he wasn't much to look at.

AMY. Ugly?

KATE. No ! or I shouldn't have asked him to share lunch.

AMY (*amazed*). Share lunch ?

KATE (*embarrassed ; laughs and comes quickly towards AMY*). Oh, I forgot. I didn't tell you that. You see, Amy, it's a long journey from town—so I had a lunch-basket—and he hadn't one, and I was sure he must be getting hungry—and they give you so much in those lunch-baskets—I never can eat it all; can you ? And—well, Amy, you wouldn't put a whole chicken leg under the seat if you saw a starving man opposite, would you ?

AMY. So you—— ?

KATE. So we nursed the lunch-basket between us.

AMY (*horrified*). Nursed it !

KATE. It was the easiest way. Would you have us put it on the seat and eat sideways like this ? (*She illustrates how awkward it would be.*) Very awkward.

AMY (*thoughtfully*). I wonder who he was ?

KATE (*seriously*). You see, I never thought he'd get out here—at such a little station.

AMY. What sort of eyes had he ?

KATE (*with enthusiasm*). Oh, nice eyes.

AMY. But what colour ?

KATE (*speaks slowly, not looking at AMY*). First I thought they were grey—then when he came nearer I saw they were deep blue, and when he leaned over—(*AMY looks shocked*) over the lunch-basket and talked, they looked almost black—wonderful eyes. (*Slowly and softly as if her thoughts had gone far.*) Wonderful eyes.

AMY (*watching her*). Cousin Kate, I believe you're in love with him.

KATE (*brought back suddenly ; rises, really a little annoyed*). Now, how ridiculous. Just because he happened to be civil in a train—a man I've never seen before. I wish you wouldn't say such silly things, Amy.

AMY (*trying to conciliate her*). I beg your pardon—I didn't mean to—

KATE. I'm sorry I told you now ; I didn't mean to tell any one. Not that there was the least reason to keep it secret. But I did think that being in love yourself, you'd be able to understand how one may be a little excited by meeting a man—and want to tell every one about it—without being at all in love.

AMY. But I always thought that being excited and wanting to talk about him—was a sign—

KATE. Now, Amy, you'll make me quite angry if you keep on like that. I did think you'd have more sense when you are just going to be married.

AMY. But I'm not going to be married.

KATE (*electrified*). What? You don't mean to tell me it's broken off?

AMY (*quietly*). He has left me.

KATE (*in a rush of pity and affection sits beside AMY and puts her arms about her*). Oh, you poor, dear child. And I've just been so horrid and cross to you. I'm sure you are well rid of him. But we'll get him back for you, some way or other. He shan't go away and leave you. How dare he—the monster?

AMY (*distressed*). No—don't say that. It was *my* fault.

KATE. Your fault?

AMY. Yes. The others don't know that, and they are all saying such hard things about him, and I feel so guilty.

(KATE *watches her a moment before she speaks*.)

KATE. Well, whatever you did, he'd no right to run away just before the wedding and upset everything so. I don't think he's a nice man.

AMY. Oh, but it *was* my fault.

KATE. Not at all. You couldn't have quarrelled unless he'd quarrelled too. I've no patience with the way men go on now. They think they can do anything they like because there are so many of us. I'll teach one of them a lesson one of these days.

AMY. But Heath wasn't like that.

KATE. I don't know what he was like. I'm thankful to say I never saw him.

AMY. I'll tell you how it was. You know Heath is an artist.

KATE. That's no excuse.

AMY. And he says artists can't take life seriously all the time.

KATE (*pleased and impressed with this remark*). He's quite right. (*Annoyed to find herself pleased with anything he said*.) I suppose he read that in a book.

AMY. It has often troubled me that he couldn't take

life as seriously as I do. The other evening I spoke to him about it. I began by telling him the way I should like us to keep Sunday after we are married. He paints on Sundays.

KATE (*unimpressed*). Does he ?

AMY. Yes, and I don't think it's right. And he is often flippant in a way I don't like. I spoke about that, too.

KATE (*looking away from AMY, speaks half to herself*). I'm beginning to feel rather sorry for poor Heath.

AMY. And when he laughed at me I lost my temper. It is hard to be made fun of when you are trying to do what's right—isn't it ?

KATE. Yes, I think it was nasty of him to make fun of you. What did he say ?

AMY. When I said I didn't like him to paint on Sunday—he said he'd only paint religious subjects.

KATE (*amused*). He's nice, isn't he ?

AMY (*gravely*). But he said it to make fun. He wouldn't see that I was in earnest.

KATE. But he really is in love with you, isn't he ?

AMY (*smiles*). Oh, yes, I'm sure he's very much in love with me. But don't you think I was right to speak out ?

KATE. Well, you know, Amy, it seems to me that if a man was nice and witty, and in love with me—I'd let him paint devils on Sunday if he wanted to. But still, I don't think that was any reason for his going away without a word. You must have said more than that.

AMY. Well— Yes. He seemed to think he had only to give me a kiss and we could go on laughing and talking as if nothing had happened. But it was the last Sunday before our marriage and I couldn't help realising how serious it all was. I think so many people become selfish when they marry. They live only for each other and forget their higher duties. And I said I wanted ours to be an *ideal* marriage, and to make it that we ought to eliminate passion as much as possible.

KATE (*very gravely*). Oh ! What did he say to that ?

AMY. He said I didn't know what I was talking about. Then I grew very angry, and I said rather more than I intended. I told him I couldn't marry him unless he changed.

KATE (*as before*). Oh !!

AMY. And he just walked out of the room. I haven't seen him since. I thought he'd come back; but he didn't.

(MRS. SPENCER enters in her bonnet; goes to KATE and greets her affectionately.)

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, Kate! I'm so glad you've come. Forgive me for not being here to welcome you, but I had to go to the Mothers' Meeting.

KATE. You good little thing.

AMY. I'll go and tell them to take your trunk upstairs. (*Takes the bag, dust-cloak and umbrella from the table*.)

KATE. Oh, thank you. (*Produces a key from her pocket*.) Here's the key. (*As she gives it to AMY she speaks aside to her with a glance to MRS. SPENCER, who has seated herself on the sofa and is drawing off her gloves*.) Don't tell any one about the man in the train.

(AMY goes out.)

MRS. SPENCER. Has Amy told you ?

KATE. Yes. I'm so sorry.

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, Kate, it's breaking my heart. I never felt so much in need of you as I do now. You will help us, won't you, dear ?

KATE. If I can—of course—but—tell me— Do people know ?

MRS. SPENCER. Only Mr. Bartlett.

KATE. Who's he ?

MRS. SPENCER. A young clergyman who is taking our vicar's duty while he is abroad.

KATE. And what does *he* say ?

MRS. SPENCER. He says it may be all for the best.

KATE (*irritated*). Oh ! Now, isn't that just like a curate ?

MRS. SPENCER. He isn't exactly a curate, dear. He's a *locum tenens*.

KATE. Well, then—isn't that just the sort of thing a *locum tenens* would say ? Do any *real* people know ?

MRS. SPENCER. Only Bobby—and he only says he'd like to *kill* Heath.

KATE (*affectionately*). Oh, how sweet of Bobby.

MRS. SPENCER (*despondently*). But I suppose we can't do anything till we know where Heath is.

KATE. Do you want him back ?

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, I don't know, I never had a word to say against him before—but what can I think of him now?

KATE. Everything I have heard of him is so charming.

MRS. SPENCER (*with enthusiasm*). Oh, he *was* so charming—and *so* amusing; he used to get me quite hysterical every Sunday night at supper. (*Laughs.*) You must get him to tell you that story about Miss Murphy and the Banshee. (*They both laugh.*) And he was so kind to us all, so attentive to me and so nice with Bobby—and his devotion to Amy was beautiful.

KATE. It was a good match for Amy, wasn't it?

MRS. SPENCER. Yes—You never thought me—a scheming woman, did you, Kate?

KATE (*gravely*). No, never.

MRS. SPENCER. No, but still Heath happens to have a very good income, and he's very clever. They say he's sure to be made an R.A. some day. And he took such a pretty old house near here—you know I wrote and told you about it.

KATE. Oh, yes, of course.

MRS. SPENCER. And how beautifully he was furnishing it—It's called Owlscot. (*Accent like "Ascot."*)

KATE. Owlscot?

MRS. SPENCER. Yes, because of the owls. Owls' cot, you know.

KATE (*delighted*). Oh, are there owls in the garden?

MRS. SPENCER. No, there aren't any, but Heath says it looks as if there ought to be, so he called it Owls' Cot. He said perhaps the owls would come if they saw it on the gate-posts.

KATE (*laughing*). I'm sure I should like Heath.

MRS. SPENCER. Amy thought people would think the name silly, so he said she could call it Owlscot, which isn't a bad-sounding name for a house, do you think?

KATE. No, I think it's delightful.

MRS. SPENCER. Heath's full of funny little fancies like that, but he's kind and thoughtful, too. When I said I couldn't afford to send Bobby to a public school he asked if he might help with the expenses—and he did it so nicely.

KATE (*with decision*). Amy mustn't lose such a nice man as that. We'll get him back for her somehow.

MRS. SPENCER (*cheering up considerably*). Oh, Kate, I knew it would be better when you came.

KATE. Ah, but we haven't got him back yet. (*She reflects before she speaks.*) When did Amy become so good?

MRS. SPENCER (*simply*). She's always been good.

KATE. Yes—but not as bad as this.

MRS. SPENCER. I fancy Mr. Bartlett has made her think more deeply. He's a very earnest man.

KATE (*slaps her hands together*). Then that *locum tenens* is at the bottom of it all.

MRS. SPENCER (*looks up, surprised*). All what?

KATE. Has he been preaching sermons about the selfishness of married couples, and the elimination of passion?

MRS. SPENCER (*still more surprised*). He gave us a very powerful sermon on that subject a few Sundays ago.

KATE (*nods her head*). That's where she got it from. I knew she didn't think of that herself. Sarah, that *locum tenens* is a bad man. Don't you let him come near the place again.

(JANE enters.)

JANE. Mr. Bartlett, mum.

(MRS. SPENCER and KATE are both startled. MR. BARTLETT enters, carrying his hat. KATE is perfectly composed. MRS. SPENCER is exceedingly embarrassed.)

MRS. SPENCER (*confused*). Oh, Mr. Bartlett, this is Cousin Kate. (*Indicating KATE.*) Miss Cousin Kate, I ought to say, I mean Miss—

KATE (*prompting her*). Curtis, dear, Curtis.

MRS. SPENCER. Yes. I couldn't remember your name for an instant. This is Mr.— (*Confused.*) Now I've forgotten yours.

KATE (*comes to the rescue by cordially extending her hand to MR. BARTLETT, as she says sweetly.*) We were just speaking of you as you came in, Mr. Bartlett.

MRS. SPENCER (*trying to make things smooth*). Yes, and Mr. Bartlett has read some of your books, Kate.

(MR. BARTLETT looks embarrassed.)

MRS. SPENCER (*seeing his embarrassment, becomes embarrassed herself*). Oh!

KATE (*sweetly to MR. BARTLETT*). You didn't like them,

did you? A bishop once told me they ought to be publicly burnt.

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, I don't think they are as bad as that.

KATE (*quaintly to MRS. SPENCER*). Thank you, Sarah.

MRS. SPENCER. But then, I don't know what they are about half the time.

(KATE *laughs and moves away*.)

BARTLETT (*places his hat on the table, pausing to give importance to his speech*). I have called to tell you that Mr. Heath Desmond has come home.

MRS. SPENCER (*joyfully*). Oh, that is good news. Oh, Kate, he's come back. (*To MR. BARTLETT*.) Have you seen him?

BARTLETT. Yes, I have spoken to him.

(He pauses and looks deliberately at KATE, who supposes she isn't wanted.)

KATE (*to MRS. SPENCER as she goes towards the door*). I'll go and take my things off.

MRS. SPENCER. Don't go, dear. (KATE stops; MRS. SPENCER turns to BARTLETT.) You can say anything before her. Now, tell us all about it. (*Sitting on the sofa*.) Sit down, Kate.

(KATE sits down, watching MR. BARTLETT narrowly as he speaks. He sits rather reluctantly, addressing himself exclusively to MRS. SPENCER.)

BARTLETT. I saw him enter his rooms, so I called, and taking the prerogative of the clergyman of the parish, I taxed him with his unaccountable disappearance.

(A shade of irritation crosses KATE'S face; MR. BARTLETT pauses and looks at her. She returns his look, smiles, betraying no feeling of any sort.)

MRS. SPENCER. And what did he say?

BARTLETT. He said he would rather not discuss his affairs with me.

(KATE looks pleased. MR. BARTLETT pauses as before and looks at KATE. She returns his look as before.)

MRS. SPENCER. And so you—

BARTLETT. I had a duty to perform, and so I was not abashed by his rebuff. (KATE titters. MR. BARTLETT glares at her. She clears her throat and looks away.) I

sketched briefly the distress he had caused in this household. Then I asked him if he intended to return.

MRS. SPENCER. Yes, yes ?

BARTLETT. He says he considers himself free, unless your daughter sends for him at once.

MRS. SPENCER (*looks from one to the other*). Why ?

BARTLETT. I promised to convey a message from her or from you.

MRS. SPENCER. Well, Amy must write to him. I'll go and tell her. (*Rises and goes towards the door. KATE rises, prepared to follow MRS. SPENCER.*)

BARTLETT (*rising*). Excuse me. (*MRS. SPENCER stops. He speaks importantly.*) Have you decided what message to send ?

MRS. SPENCER. He must have a note asking him to come, if that's what he's waiting for.

KATE. Of course.

BARTLETT. Is there not a wiser alternative ?

(*BARTLETT looks at KATE, hoping she will go. KATE deliberately sits down, showing she intends to stay.*)

MRS. SPENCER (*comes towards MR. BARTLETT*). I don't think I quite grasp your meaning.

BARTLETT. Well, then, is Mr. Desmond the man to trust your daughter to ? I do not wish to say anything against his character, but he has always seemed to me a—a-frivolous man. And is not his present conduct a sign of inconstancy ? Your daughter is on the eve of taking perhaps the most important step in her life. Is it not well to pause while there is yet time ?

MRS. SPENCER (*much perturbed; appeals to KATE*). What do you think, Kate ?

KATE (*coldly*). Does it matter what anybody thinks, except Amy ?

MRS. SPENCER. But of course it was very funny of Heath to run away like that, and he might do it again.

KATE. Oh, Sarah !

BARTLETT. After I have delivered her message, it may be too late for her to retreat from her promise—with honour.

MRS. SPENCER (*looks at KATE, who makes no movement, then turns to BARTLETT*). Perhaps you had better see AMY yourself. (*KATE tries to attract the attention of MRS.*

SPENCER *in order to stop her saying this. MRS. SPENCER doesn't notice KATE's movement.*) You may be able to put it—more—foreibly than I can.

BARTLETT (*readily*). I will most willingly interview her, if you wish, but before doing so I have something to say to you which—it is impossible to say—before—a third person. (*Stares at KATE. KATE rises, smiles at MRS. SPENCER, and goes out by the window without looking round. MR. BARTLETT approaches MRS. SPENCER.*)

BARTLETT. If Mr. Desmond deserts your daughter now, she will naturally feel humiliated.

MRS. SPENCER (*sorrowfully*). Oh, yes—ean't you see ?

BARTLETT. And as—I wish—to save her all the pain I can, and as I find her essential to my own happiness, I desire to tell her that if she releases herself from this engagement—she need not be humiliated—for I would then come forward and offer her—myself.

MRS. SPENCER. That wouldn't be quite the same thing —would it ?

BARTLETT. I think that she should know that she has this alternative before she communieates with Mr. Desmond.

MRS. SPENCER (*dubiously*). I wish you'd let me see what Kate says.

(*He looks momentarily uneasy, then recovers himself.*)

BARTLETT. She is a stranger to me.

MRS. SPENCER. Yes, yes—I see.

BARTLETT. As your daughter is so young and her present situation so delicate—I thought it was my duty to ask your permission before speaking to her.

MRS. SPENCER (*troubled*). I don't know whether I ought to let you see her or not.

BARTLETT. It cannot do her any harm to hear me.

MRS. SPENCER (*impressed by this remark*). No. She isn't obliged to accept you, is she ?

BARTLETT. Certainly not.

MRS. SPENCER. I suppose you'd better speak to her. If you'll wait here I'll send her to you.

(*MRS. SPENCER goes out. KATE enters with her hat in her hand. Both she and BARTLETT feel constrained when they find themselves alone. They look at each other in turns before speaking. KATE places her hat on the table.*)

KATE (*pleasantly*). What very pleasant weather we are having.

BARTLETT. I beg your pardon.

KATE (*clears her throat and speaks more distinctly*). What very pleasant weather we are having.

BARTLETT. Oh, yes—but I think there'll be rain soon.

KATE (*pleasantly*). Possibly storms. (*Smiles sweetly at him.*)

(*She sits down, not looking at him. He looks at her uneasily before he speaks.*)

BARTLETT (*takes his hat*). Will you kindly tell Miss Speneer I will await her in the garden?

KATE (*pleasantly*). Yes—I'll tell her.

BARTLETT. Thank you.

(*He goes out by the window. As soon as he is out of sight, KATE jumps up, goes towards the window and glances in the direction he has gone.*)

MRS. SPENCER enters. KATE comes quickly towards her as she speaks.)

KATE. He's gone into the garden. Are you going to let him see her?

MRS. SPENCER. I've just told Amy.

KATE. Is he going to ask her to marry him?

MRS. SPENCER. Kate—you've been listening?

KATE. No, I haven't.

MRS. SPENCER. How else could you know? It's miraculous.

KATE. Don't you think it's very dangerous to let her see him now? Heath has hurt her pride; she's smarting. Can't you remember how it felt at her age? I'm so afraid she'll sacrifice the future to save the present.

MRS. SPENCER (*perturbed*). But I've told Mr. Bartlett I'd send Amy to him.

KATE. Send her to me first.

(AMY enters.)

MRS. SPENCER. But how can I explain it to him?

KATE (*glances at AMY, then says rapidly to MRS. SPENCER*). Don't explain it. Go and show him the nasturtiums or the lobelias or whatever's out.

(*Pushes MRS. SPENCER out at the window. MRS. SPENCER disappears.*)

AMY. Mother said Mr. Bartlett wanted to see me.

KATE. Yes. He's waiting for you in the garden. He brought a message for you.

AMY. From Heath—mother told me.

KATE. What reply are you going to send?

AMY. I don't know yet.

KATE. Hadn't you better make up your mind before you go and see Mr. Bartlett?

AMY. Mother said he had something very important to say to me. I think I had better hear what it is first. (*Going towards the window.*)

KATE. Your reply to Heath is more important. (AMY hesitates.) You want to do what's right, don't you?

AMY (*hesitatingly*). Yes. (*With conviction.*) Yes—I do. Do you think I ought to forgive Heath?

KATE (*quietly*). I thought he had to forgive you?

AMY (*after a pause, during which KATE watches her closely*). What message do you think I ought to send him?

KATE. I think I should write and say you are sorry for what you said to him, and that you see now that it was a little piece of presumption for a young girl to talk that way to a grown-up man. (AMY turns and stares at KATE.) And ask him to forgive you because you are so young and inexperienced—and he will, because you are so pretty.

AMY. But that is putting myself entirely in the wrong?

KATE. Weren't you?

AMY. No. I blame myself very much for losing my temper with him. But I can't take back what I said before. It isn't a question of what I wish—but of right and wrong.

KATE. And you are sure that a young girl who has never been anywhere much or seen anything particular is the proper judge of what is right and wrong for a man ten years older than herself? And is all his goodness to go for nothing? Amy, dear, you'd be a fool to let that man go—and just think—he chose you—who bring him nothing but your little self—out of the whole world.

AMY. Am I to thank him for loving me?

KATE. Yes. You would if you realised how many

girls there are who would make good wives and how few men who would make good husbands.

AMY. But I can't give up my principles. I'm prepared to suffer for them.

KATE. Well, don't be like most people who suffer for their principles, and make everybody else suffer for them too. If we want to marry we must be prepared to make compromises—

AMY. It may be that I shall do my duty better singly.

KATE. I'm sure you'll get into Heaven sooner by doing your duty to your neighbour, than by being very good all by yourself. I mustn't urge you. I only want to save you from making the same mistake I made. I wouldn't make compromises, I demanded the perfect man. Now I know there isn't one. So I've had disappointment after disappointment, till I have to face the worst one of all—for our lives are empty if we aren't loved. A woman's life is so meaningless by itself. And I have a great deal in my life. I have a profession, I'm successful, I'm invited and welcomed everywhere—but I'm lonely, Amy,—desperately lonely. I'd give it all up for a real home with a husband and children. And look how much worse it is for women with no object in life—no work and no children. I only want you to be happy, and not disappointed, like me.

AMY (*kisses KATE softly on the cheek*). I think I'd better write to him—and ask him to come back. Oh, Cousin Kate, you make me feel so small.

(KATE puts her arms about AMY, who falls on her shoulder, weeping a little.)

KATE (*pets her, a little overcome with emotion*). I'm not very wise myself, dear, but I've knocked about so much I want you to be taken care of. Oh, it must be so beautiful to be taken care of.

(AMY goes to the writing-desk and sits, drying her eyes.)

AMY. I think I'll just write and tell Heath I don't know much. (*Takes a sheet of paper and begins to write a note*.)

KATE. Amy—Amy! Perhaps you had better go and see Mr. Bartlett before you write that letter.

AMY. No, I'd rather not. I'm sure I'm doing right to ask Heath to forgive me. (AMY writes the letter.)

When she has finished it she turns to KATE.) Will this do ?
(She holds out the letter. KATE comes towards her, takes it and reads it as AMY addresses the envelope.)

KATE. That's very sweet. (Gives it back to AMY, who puts it in envelope.) Now lick it up. (AMY fastens it, then rises.) Mr. Bartlett said he would take your answer to Heath. Shall we go and give it to him ?

AMY (*shyly giving letter to KATE*). You give it to him. I don't think I'll see him now.

(AMY goes out. KATE marches towards the window, waving the letter triumphantly till she meets MRS. SPENCER coming in from the garden.)

MRS. SPENCER. Where's Amy ? Isn't she coming ?
(Enter MR. BARTLETT, following MRS. SPENCER.)

KATE. No. (Showing the letter.) This is her reply to Mr. Desmond. (Turns to BARTLETT.) Which you so kindly offered to convey. (Gives the letter to MR. BARTLETT.)

MRS. SPENCER. But isn't she going to see Mr. Bartlett ?
KATE. She asked me to deliver her letter for her.

MRS. SPENCER. Oh ! (She turns to BARTLETT with an embarrassed smile.)

BARTLETT. I will take this to Mr. Desmond.

KATE. Thank you. (BARTLETT goes out. KATE turns to MRS. SPENCER.) She's asked him to come back.

MRS. SPENCER (*sinks comfortably on a chair*). Oh, I'm so relieved. Mr. Bartlett has been upsetting me so. He got me so that I didn't know whether I wanted Heath back or not.

KATE (*apprehensively*). I suppose he'll take the letter at once. You see we've wasted a lot of time already, and Heath considers himself free unless he hears *at once*.

MRS. SPENCER. Mr. Bartlett knows that.

KATE (*reassured*). But he doesn't know what is in the letter. He'll be in a hurry to find out.

MRS. SPENCER (*smiling comfortably*). So we shall have the wedding on Friday after all.

KATE (*brightly*). And Amy will be the bride, and you'll give her away, and Bobby will be best man. (*Half-humorously, half-sadly.*) And I shall just be one of the guests and throw rice.

MRS. SPENCER (*laughing.*) Oh, Kate, you are so funny. (*Seriously.*) What did you say to Amy ?

KATE. I told her the best thing a woman could have was a home with a husband and a baby.

MRS. SPENCER (*mildly surprised*). Why, Kate, that isn't at all the way you write in those books of yours.

KATE (*half-laughing, half in earnest*). I shan't write any more of those silly books. I thought I was being so clever, but I was showing my ignorance all the time. My next book shall be all about love; my hero and heroine shall be married and go and live in a dingy little house—but it will be a palace to them.

MRS. SPENCER (*looks penetratingly at KATE*). Kate, I believe you have something to tell me. (*Goes towards her*.)

KATE (*moving away in agitation*). No, I haven't.

MRS. SPENCER. I've been so absorbed in Amy's trouble I haven't had time to think of you. But now you've come and made it all right for us. (*Goes towards her again, speaking emotionally*.) Oh, Cousin Kate, what should we do without you? (*Takes KATE'S hand*. KATE hangs her head. MRS. SPENCER speaks coaxingly.) Now, do tell me—are you in love?

KATE. Oh, I don't know. I think I must be. Yes, I am. I know I am. (*Breaks away from MRS. SPENCER*.)

MRS. SPENCER. Do tell me.

KATE. No, no, I can't. Besides—there's nothing to tell.

(AMY enters.)

AMY. Mother, don't you think some one should go over to Owlseot? The drawing-room hasn't been aired for two days, and the piano is there.

MRS. SPENCER. How thoughtful you are, Amy. Whom shall we send?

KATE. I'll go.

AMY (*surprised*). You?

KATE. Yes, I need a walk and some fresh air.

AMY. I'll go with you.

KATE. No. You must stay in case Heath comes—

MRS. SPENCER. Then I'll go.

KATE. No. (*Gets her hat*.) You have to hurry on with Amy's trousseau. (*They look at her; she becomes more agitated, then goes to MRS. SPENCER*.) Can't you see I want to go alone? I shall have hysterics if I'm opposed. (*Puts on her hat and gloves, and takes her*

sunshade, through the following scene. To AMY.) Tell me the way, please.

AMY. You keep along the high road.

KATE. Yes.

AMY. Till you come to a pond covered with green slime.

MRS. SPENCER. It's shorter across the fields.

AMY. But she'll lose her way.

KATE. What do I do when I come to the pond covered with green slime ?

AMY. Take the second turning to the left.

MRS. SPENCER. Isn't it the third turning ?

AMY. No, the second.

MRS. SPENCER (*murmuring to herself*). Oh, yes. The third is a private road.

KATE. Seeond to the left.

AMY. Then you walk along till you come to our house. It's a white cottage with a gable and a lot of fir-trees in the garden ; you can't miss it. The name is on the gate-post : " Owlscot."

MRS. SPENCER. Owl's cot, you know.

KATE. I'll find it. (*Goes towards the window.*)

MRS. SPENCER (*crossing to the writing-desk*). Wait a minute. You'll want the key. (*Opens a drawer and takes out a large front-door key.*)

AMY. Some one else will have to go to light the fire.

KATE (*taking the key*). I'll do that.

AMY. Oh, will you ? Only in the drawing - room because of the piano.

KATE. Yes, yes, I'll attend to everything.

(*As she goes out of the window MRS. SPENCER and AMY both follow her, speaking together.*)

MRS. SPENCER. You'd better take an umbrella. It's going to rain. It looks very cloudy.

AMY. Don't forget to fasten the windows, and the ones upstairs as well. (*COUSIN KATE disappears in the garden.*)

MRS. SPENCER (*turning to AMY*). What a jewel Cousin Kate is. I knew things would be better when *she* came.

AMY. Yes, I was so undecided before, but I feel content now. I know I've done right.

MRS. SPENCER (*embracing AMY*). My good little girl ! (*Kisses her with a sigh of satisfaction.*) Now I must finish marking your night-dresses.

AMY. I'll go and get them out.

(AMY goes out. BOBBY enters *whistling from the garden.*)

MRS. SPENCER. Hullo, how was it you didn't meet Cousin Kate?

BOBBY. I hid in the waitin' room till she'd gone, beeause she got out of the same carriage with Heath.

MRS. SPENCER. The same carriage with Heath! How funny! Did you speak to Heath?

BOBBY. Not then, but I've just been to his lodgin's.

MRS. SPENCER. Had he got Amy's letter?

BOBBY. No. He said he'd been waitin' and waitin' for it, and when I said she'd been in the house all day, he said he supposed she wasn't goin' to send it.

MRS. SPENCER (*concerned*). Well, what's Mr. Bartlett been doing?

BOBBY. When I was comin' away, I saw Mr. Bartlett go and leave a letter at Heath's door—about two minutes ago.

MRS. SPENCER. He took long enough about it. (*Smiling.*) Heath must have read it by now.

BOBBY. But when Mr. Bartlett left the letter Heath had gone away again.

MRS. SPENCER (*dismayed*). Gone away! Gone away again without getting Amy's letter. Oh, dear!

BOBBY. He was only goin' to Owlscot.

MRS. SPENCER (*cheerfully*). Oh, Cousin Kate will be able to explain it all to him. *She's just gone to Owlscot.*

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE.—*A sitting-room at Owlscot. It is an old room with panelled walls and beams across the ceiling. Opposite the audience there is a wide casement with diamond panes. There is a door in the wall on the left-hand side of the audience, and a deep fireplace opposite the door. Beside the fireplace is an old oak settle, facing the audience. A piano stands against the wall beside the door, nearer the audience than the door; nearer still to the audience beside the piano stands a chair. Over this chair there is a stag's head with antlers. There is a round table near the centre of the stage and a small table between the fireplace and the window, with a big brass candlestick upon it; several oak chairs, etc. Curtains are drawn across the casement so that when the curtain rises the scene is very dimly lighted.*

The stage is empty at first. Then a door is heard to shut with a bang. Footsteps are heard approaching over bare wooden floors.

(Enter KATE, dressed as in Act I., with the front-door key in her hand. She closes the door, and looks around the room.)

KATE (*in a sepulchral tone as she looks about her*). All alone in an empty house. (*She sniffs twice as if the room were close.*) Oh! how stuffy. (*Places the key, with her gloves and parasol, on the table, also her coat, goes to the window and draws the curtains. She throws the casement open wide, letting in the daylight.*) As she turns from the window she sees the piano.) What a grand chance to try my voice! (*Opens the piano, plays a scale, standing, then hums a tune in a light voice. Lets out her voice in an arpeggio scale.* Strikes several notes on the piano

till she finds the top note of her arpeggio. Speaks disappointedly.) Only E. (Plays an arpeggio scale in F on the piano again, takes a breath and begins to sing her arpeggio scale, but funks the high note.)

(A man's voice sings the scale without. KATE starts violently and shuts the piano with a bang.)

(HEATH DESMOND hoists himself on to the windowsill without and leans into the room. He is a man about thirty, though it is difficult to guess his age from his appearance. He looks young. His temperament is far more Latin than British. He is gay and whimsical, and his mind is rapid and fanciful. He is so extraordinarily frank and direct in his approach that it is impossible to feel a stranger in his presence. He is immensely daring, but so tactful that he is never impertinent. He wears flannels and a straw hat.)

KATE (*concerned*). What are *you* doing here ?

HEATH (*unconcerned*). What are *you* doing here ?

KATE. Never mind, you shouldn't have followed me.

HEATH (*pleasantly*). If you *will* choose a house with nobody in it,—

KATE (*interrupting him indignantly*). I hope you don't think I came here to give you an opportunity.

HEATH. I thought I wouldn't miss one. (*He swings into the room.*)

KATE (*betraying a little alarm*). You mustn't come in.

HEATH. Why not ? Is this *your* house ? (*Takes his hat off.*)

KATE (*faltering*). No—but—

HEATH. Then it's neutral ground—like the train.

KATE (*goes a little towards him and speaks persuasively and seriously*). But if I ask you to go—

HEATH (*looks at her, smiling*). You'd be as rude as if you asked me to get out of the railway carriage.

KATE. Then I must go myself.

(She turns to the table, and is about to gather up her sunshade and gloves, etc. He goes towards her as he speaks.)

HEATH. That's as rude as if you got out of the railway carriage because I got in.

KATE (*hesitates, still trying to be haughty and indignant*). You know you've no right to come in here.

HEATH. What right have you? (*She holds the key up to show him. He bends over it, examines it curiously, not touching it*). How on earth did you get it?

KATE. I am here at the request of the owner of this house.

HEATH (*to himself; turning away*). Oh—a friend of my landlord.

KATE. Do you still dispute my right to be here?

HEATH (*turning to her*). No, I only wish to establish my own.

KATE. You can't.

HEATH (*with frank good-humour which weakens her dignity*). I could if you asked me to stay. I'll be very good.

KATE (*hesitatingly*). But you know we oughtn't to stay here together.

HEATH. Why not, if we want to?

KATE. I didn't say I wanted to.

HEATH. To say you oughtn't to is about the same as to say you'd like to. If you really don't want to, it's so much easier—

KATE (*a broad smile overspreads her face and she turns to him good-humouredly*). Oh, stop! (*She means "Stop your rigmarole."*)

HEATH. Didn't we have fun in the train?

KATE (*looks at him brightly*). Yes. (*Remembering she ought to be strict with him*). But now you've turned our fun into indiscretion.

HEATH (*half-sitting on the edge of the table, speaks with enthusiasm, not noticing her seriousness*). How we flew through the woods and over the towns!

KATE. You've made me feel ashamed, and I didn't want to.

HEATH (*carrying on his former speech*). Like a god and a goddess dropped from two planets. You said so yourself as we crossed the viaduct. I was Mars—you Venus—

KATE (*interrupting him indignantly*). I never said I was Venus.

HEATH (*making her a profound bow*). Permit me to complete the simile.

KATE (*forgetting herself for a moment, takes his vein of mock gallantry and drops him a deep curtsey*). Oh—h—h ! (*Suddenly remembering herself, she recovers her seriousness.*) I think it's time you flew back to your planet.

(*Both the next speeches are spoken at the same time. KATE is seriously trying to impress HEATH; he begins his speech in a low voice after she has begun hers, and speaks faster, and louder as he goes on—trying to talk her down.*)

KATE. I hoped there was no harm in strangers confiding in each other as we did. I thought we had risen above convention, but by coming here you remind me that we sank below it. I see now that we were not two souls impelled to mutual utterance, but just two people who gossiped together before they were introduced. We ought never to have met again.

HEATH. And I was wondering how you would look without your hat. It became quite an obsession with me. It is still. I should so like to see you without your hat. It wouldn't be much trouble. There's a looking-glass just behind you. I think you might take your hat off. (*They have come towards each other as they speak, each trying to talk the other down. KATE, seeing how absurd the situation is, stops and laughs. HEATH says plaintively.*) Won't you please take your hat off ?

KATE (*half-exasperated, half-amused, takes her hat off*). There !

HEATH (*surveying her with admiration*). Jolly !

KATE (*really pleased, but appearing supereilious*). Thank you. (*Turns to the looking-glass, preparing to put her hat on again.*)

HEATH. No, don't. (*She turns to him*.) Don't put it on again.

KATE. Why ?

HEATH. I don't want you to go just yet.

KATE (*laughs*). Oh, but I must.

HEATH. Well, let me have a proper look at the hat first. It's quite the prettiest one I've seen this season.

KATE (*pleased, holding out the hat towards him*). I'm glad you like it ; I trimmed it myself.

(*HEATH pretends to examine the hat, and while he does so he takes it from her. She yields it without suspicion. He marches away with it.*)

KATE. Well—you really have more assurance !

(*He mounts the chair beside the piano and hangs the hat on the antlers above it. She watches him amazed and concerned.*)

KATE. What are you putting it there for ?

HEATH (*turns to her on the chair, smiling*). To make assurance doubly sure. (*Steps off the chair.*)

KATE. Do you think I can't get up there and get it ?

HEATH. You can get up and get it.

(*KATE moves as if to get the hat. HEATH sits in the chair beneath it, crosses his legs and folds his arms. KATE, visibly annoyed, then turns to him and says seriously without betraying any temper.*)

KATE. Don't you think you're rather taking advantage of me by coming here ?

HEATH (*smiling*). No, no—I don't. For as I so pithily remarked a moment ago, this is neutral ground. We are the same as in the train—only—we aren't getting along quite so fast. (*KATE sits in a chair at some distance, turning it till it has its back to him, expressing disapproval in every attitude. There is a short silence; HEATH sighs heavily. She does not smile.*) Shall we play and sing ? (*This amuses her. She smiles unseen by him, then frowns. HEATH rises and comes towards her, speaking naturally and sincerely.*) I say, you know—I don't want to—

KATE (*rises haughtily and moves away*). I don't think it is very polite of you to detain me here against my wish.

(*He thinks she is going to get her hat, so he rushes back to his chair and sits.*)

HEATH. I wish you wouldn't pose so.

KATE (*loftily*). Pose !

HEATH. Yes. You were so jolly and natural in the train. Now you are behaving just like any *real lady* would.

KATE. I am sorry if I didn't behave like one then.

HEATH. Oh, one doesn't think about whether Andromache, or Sarah Siddons, or Saint Cecilia were real ladies. I had you up among them. (*She smiles, pleased with his compliment. He comes towards her as he speaks. Her manner stiffens as he approaches her.*) Whatever you do is sure to be all right.

KATE. I'm not aware that I committed any unusual breach in speaking to a fellow traveller. (*She moves off with an air, and looks off from the window.*)

(*He puts his hands in his pockets and watches her a little wistfully.*)

HEATH. You *do* disappoint me !

KATE. It isn't *my* fault if you formed a wrong opinion of me.

HEATH (*judging the effect of his remark upon her*). But I didn't think you were the kind of woman who'd talk about her soul and love to *any* man.

KATE (*as he supposes, turns to him indignantly*). I'm not.

HEATH (*meets her with a smile*). Of course you're not. I know you from her as well as I know you from this real lady with all her spikes on. (*KATE moves away, pretending not to listen.*) Women are such frightful cowards. They are always clamouring for emancipation and then—when the deliverer comes—they take fright and run.

KATE (*mockingly*). How true—how true !!!

HEATH. You know we agreed before, how absurd it was to have all these conventions keeping men and women apart—but I never saw any one more conventional than you are now. I *would* be more consistent. (*Turns away from her.*)

KATE (*after a moment's reflection*). Suppose I do consent to stay—(*he turns to her quickly*)—just the fraction of a second longer— (*She does not know how to finish her sentence.*)

HEATH. Well—we could talk.

KATE. That *would* be thrilling.

HEATH (*laughs*). Don't be nasty about it. We might have tea, too.

KATE (*surprised into a laugh*). Here ?

HEATH. Yes. We have to light a fire anyway, to air the room.

KATE (*surprised into seriousness*). How do you know that ?

HEATH. Well—haven't we ?

KATE. Yes, but—it strikes me as quite weird that *you* should know.

HEATH (*going nearer, looks at her and speaks insinuat-*

ingly). When two people are thoroughly sympathetic they often divine each other's thoughts.

KATE (*embarrassed under his gaze, but trying to carry it off lightly*). Do they ?

HEATH. And since I know we have to light a fire to air—

KATE (*interrupting him*). You needn't be so proud of your divinations. That's the only thought of mine you ever divined.

HEATH (*prolonging the word*). Oh ! ! ! !

KATE (*faces him, defiantly*). Well ?

HEATH. Shall I tell you some of the others ?

KATE (*quickly*). No, thank you !

HEATH. Do let me. I am deeply interested in occultism.

KATE (*raising her voice and speaking quickly to stop him speaking*). Well, I'm not. I think it's a nasty, creepy subject, and if you think you read any more of my thoughts— You didn't— (*Breaks off suddenly to say.*) Dear me, how I am shouting.

HEATH. As I was saying, when you so rudely interrupted me, we have to light a fire here, anyway—on account of the piano.

KATE (*turns round to him quickly*). How do you know about the piano ? Oh ! (*Goes towards him, and asks in some anxiety.*) Do you know who I am ?

HEATH. No. Do you know who I am ?

KATE. No.

HEATH. Would you like to ?

KATE. No. (*Moves away.*)

HEATH. It would rather interrupt our romance to exchange cards, wouldn't it ?

KATE. Yes,—no, that is,—we aren't having a romance.

HEATH. Not yet, but when we get cosy over our tea-cups we ought to feel quite romantic.

KATE (*turns to him*). You talk as if this were *our* house.

HEATH. We are Silverlocks and this is the house the three bears lived in.

KATE (*ignoring this remark*). Besides—how do you know there is any tea here ?

HEATH. Silverlocks didn't know she would find any soup.

KATE. What *are* you talking about?

HEATH (*in a tone of serious reproach*). Do you mean to say you don't remember the story of Silverlocks and the three bears?

KATE. No.

HEATH. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. (*She shrugs her shoulders and turns to the fireplace.*) Remembering nursery stories is one of the chief signs of election. It shows you are still a child; that you haven't forgotten the days of games and dreams, when your spirit was too sportive to be satisfied with a world of facts, so made its own world of fancies. That's the kingdom of the children. Nearly every one leaves it afterwards. But the elect always hold their places there. They never forget the games and the dreams. That's what gives distinction to their humour and imagination; a charm to the point of view; the signs by which their scattered spirits beckon each other after they are grown up. And how could they hold their places in the kingdom if they forgot exactly how it felt to be a child? And how could they remember that, if they forgot anything so important as the nursery stories?

KATE (*charmed with his speech, sits amiably on the settle*). Tell me about Silverlocks and the three bears.

HEATH. Well—she went for a walk one day, Silverlocks did, and she came to a little house in a wood where the three bears lived, but they were all out. So first she drank their soup—at least she only tasted the father and mother bears' soup, but she drank the little one's all up. There's a picture of her drinking it out of a blue bowl.

KATE (*suddenly*). Oh, yes. She had a yellow dress on.

HEATH (*delighted*). Yes. You *do* remember her? (*Drops beside KATE on the settle.*) I knew you must be one of us when I found you singing grand opera all by yourself. That's one of the signs.

KATE (*amused*). I never met any one like you in my life.

HEATH (*sentimentally*). I've been looking for *you* a long time.

KATE (*embarrassed*). Hadn't we better— (*Rises.*)

HEATH (*jumping up cheerfully*). Make tea—yes. We must hurry up and light a fire. The three bears ought

to have done that before they went out. We want some paper first, then some chips, then some coal.

KATE (*protesting a little at his instructions*). I know how to lay a fire.

HEATH (*taking a newspaper from his pocket*). Oh ! (*Goes towards her*.) Then will you crumple that up in the grate ? (*She takes the paper from him mechanically*.) While I go and look for coal and stuff. (*He goes out quickly, leaving the door open*. KATE crosses to the fireplace, stands still a moment, then throws the paper on the floor.)

KATE (*with decision*). No, Kate, it won't do.

(*She crosses to the chair by the piano, mounts it and takes her hat from the antlers, steps off the chair, puts her hat on hastily, takes her sunshade and gloves and coat from the table, goes to the door, pushes it to, then goes to the window, looks round at the door, then pulls up her skirts and prepares to mount the window-sill. As she steps on to the window-sill, HEATH enters with a kettle in his right hand and a coal-box with coal and wood in his left*.)

HEATH (*pauses on the threshold and looks at her*). Hullo !

KATE (*screams*). Oh !

(*She quickly lets her skirt down and looks round*.)

HEATH (*deposits the kettle and the coal-box on the floor, then goes towards her*.)

HEATH. Why ?

KATE. I'd better.

HEATH. Where's the harm ? We could be so jolly together. You might trust me. I'm really nice. I'm not dangerous.

KATE. Dangerous men aren't half as dangerous as nice ones.

HEATH. You'll feel all right about staying to tea—when you've had tea.

KATE. But—I'd better not.

HEATH. You know you'll wish you had if you don't.

KATE. It'll be better to wish I had than to wish I hadn't.

HEATH. I never met any one I could get on with quite so well, but of course if you want to be prudish and

think we ought to throw away such a good chance of being just our natural selves—

(Wanders towards the piano, opens the top lid and peers among the wires with one eye on KATE. KATE remains standing on the window-seat in a state of indecision, thinking she ought to go, but longing to stay. Deciding not to go yet, she slowly lets fall her coat, her gloves, and her sunshade, one by one on the window-seat beside her. She glances at HEATH. He appears to be taking no notice of her. She steps off the window-seat and stands still a moment, not quite knowing how to proceed. At last, receiving no help from HEATH, she boldly seizes the kettle, hurries with it to the hearth, and kneels in front of the fireplace.)

KATE. Now the chips.

(HEATH brings her the coal-box with the wood, etc.)

HEATH. Here they are, and the paper. *(She lays the fire as she speaks.)*

KATE. By the way, wasn't it Silverlocks who had to look after the fire?

HEATH *(giving her a match).* No, that was Cinderella.

KATE. Oh, yes, with the ugly sisters.

HEATH. And the Prince—she fell in love with him.

KATE *(looks at him).* Oh— *(Lights the fire.)*

HEATH. Yes. And she married him.

KATE. Yes—but I wish you wouldn't talk so much when you see I'm busy.

(He goes towards the door while she watches the fire.)

HEATH. I'll go and look for cups and things. *(Hesitates near the door.)* I say, you won't go away while I'm out, will you?

KATE. What do you say?

HEATH. You won't go away while I'm out?

(She takes off her hat and lays it on the settle for response, then turns to the fire again, stooping on the hearth and poking chips between the bars, before she puts the kettle on. He watches her, then tiptoes to the seat, takes her hat and tiptoes out with it, half-running and glancing back at her as he goes. KATE sits on the hearth with a sigh of pleasure.)

KATE (*talking aloud to herself*). Oh, Kate, why not for once in a way? It's good experience for you, and it may do to put in your next novel. If he gets too—(*She rises and stands on the hearth.*) You can make a few queenly gestures and sweep out. (*Turns to the settle.*) Where's my hat?

(HEATH enters. *He has a common teapot and two cups hanging from the fingers of his right hand. In the same hand he carries some knives and spoons and two saucers and a butter-dish. In his left hand a bread trencher with KATE's hat on it. Half a loaf squeezed under one arm, and a milk-jug pressed against his side with the other. A small paper bag in his mouth.*)

HEATH (*speaking with the bag in his mouth*). This is the tea in this bag.

(KATE laughs when he enters, goes to him and helps him to deposit the things on the table. She now abandons herself to the spirit of the picnic.)

HEATH (*with the bag in his mouth*). Take the tea.

KATE. Give me the cups. Now the knives. Oh, be careful—now the teapot—now the tea— (*Takes the bag from his mouth and lays it down.*)

HEATH. Here's the milk. And here's the bread.

KATE. Now, you watch the kettle while I lay the table.

(*He goes to the hearth, while she quickly arranges the things on the table, and puts tea in the teapot.*)

HEATH. I hope the three bears won't come home before we've finished.

KATE. What happened to Silverlocks when they came home?

HEATH.

“ ‘ We'll kill the child and eat her for our dinner,’
The Father growled; but said the Mother: ‘ No,
For supper she shall be, and I will skin her.’ ”

KATE (*in a little squeaky voice*). “ ‘ No,’ said the Little Cub, ‘ we'll let her go.’ ” (*They both laugh as she pushes a loaf and knife towards HEATH, who joins her at the table.*) You eat, I'll butter.

HEATH. I'm awfully hungry—aren't you? We didn't have much lunch, did we? Only one between us.

KATE. I suppose you mean I didn't divide the chicken fairly.

(She smiles at him. He laughs with pleasure, and goes on cutting bread as he speaks.)

HEATH. I never thought when we finished our last meal that we'd be having the next together. I wish—
(Giving her a slice of bread as he says, sentimentally.) I wish we could have all our meals—

KATE *(to interrupt him).* I'm sure that kettle must be boiling. *(Goes over to the hearth. Heath smiles to himself and wags his head, knowingly, when her back is turned. She looks at the kettle, then turns to him.)* What does a kettle do when it boils? Does it just smoke?

HEATH. I think it spits.

KATE. It's beginning to growl a little. Does that mean anything?

HEATH *(goes towards the kettle, a little anxiously).* I don't know. But I'm sure the lid comes off when it boils over. *(Bends down and peers at the kettle, then says, humorously.)* I wish we'd brought a cookery-book. *(Kate laughs and kneels down in front of the kettle. He stands behind her, looking down at her.)* I say. D'ye know, your hair's a little ruffled?

KATE *(amiably).* Is it—where?

HEATH. In that place it's so difficult for you to get at yourself. *(Touches her hair.)*

KATE *(loftily).* Oh! *(Rises and moves slowly to the window, where she stands and looks out.)*

HEATH *(watching her).* The girl rose from the fender and fixing him with a haughty glance swept across the apartment with the air of a queen. She stood gazing wistfully across the park—

(Kate laughs and turns from the window.)

KATE. It's no use pretending with you.

HEATH *(smiling frankly).* Not the slightest. But of course it's all right for you to keep your spikes out for a little while. I don't see how a really nice woman could do anything else.

KATE *(comes towards him protesting).* I'm not a really nice woman, I mean—I'm an individual like you. *(He looks up at her, smiles knowingly; she becomes embarrassed.)* Oh, the kettle. *(Goes quickly to the fire.)*

HEATH. Spikes!

KATE (*anxiously looking at the kettle*). No—but it's—it's—

HEATH (*excitedly, looking at the kettle*). It's spitting.

KATE. Yes. Catch hold.

HEATH. It'll burn me.

KATE (*gives him her handkerchief*). Wrap this round.

(*He wraps the handkerchief round his left hand, takes the kettle off the fire and hurries to the table with it.*)

HEATH. Ah! Oh! (*Yells as he pours the water into the teapot.*)

KATE (*anxiously, as she comes to him*). Did you burn yourself?

HEATH (*howls as he holds out his left hand to her with the handkerchief round it*). I think so. I think so.

(*She unwinds the handkerchief carefully and examines his hand. He grimaces when she looks at his face, and smiles when she looks at his hand.*)

KATE (*taking her handkerchief and dropping his hand*). No, you didn't. (*HEATH laughs, and puts the kettle back in the fender. She turns to the table smiling.*) Let's eat. (*They sit opposite each other at the table. KATE makes the tea.*)

HEATH. I like mine strong with lots of sugar.

KATE. You'll have to wait till it mixes.

HEATH. Brews is the word.

(*KATE laughs, then regards him steadily across the table.*)

KATE. I don't know what you are.

HEATH. I'm Dublin.

KATE. Is that why you're so unpractical?

HEATH. I had to tell *you* what a kettle does when it's ready.

KATE. We must both be artists.

HEATH. We might be just a rieh lady and gentleman who've always been too grand to work.

KATE. Oh, no. They never enjoy themselves as much as this. (*She pours out two cups of tea. When she puts the teapot down their eyes meet.*)

HEATH (*slowly*). Well, at any rate we—are—opposite each other again.

(KATE drops her eyes. Pushes one cup over to HEATH. Takes her own. There is a short, embarrassed silence.)

KATE. Is your tea all right ?

HEATH (drinks ; then says, seriously). Yes, thank you. (Then mocking the constraint of the situation.) It's a charming afternoon, is it not ?

(KATE laughs.)

KATE. What possible connection can you have with a workaday world ?

HEATH. I'm only rotting now so that I won't tell the truth. (Leans across the table.) Were you ever in love ?

KATE (smiles thoughtfully). I'm twenty-nine.

HEATH (confidentially). Tell me about the first time.

KATE. I can't remember which it was.

HEATH. As many as that ?

KATE (simply). My world has been filled with two kinds of men : the men I loved and the men who loved me. They were never the same. (Leans back.) Now I've told you the story of my life.

HEATH. Then you've never met him.

KATE. I'm only twenty-nine.

HEATH. You will meet him.

KATE. I don't intend to die until I do.

(They laugh. They both drink and HEATH watches her over his cup all the time. KATE meets HEATH's eyes, puts her cup down, looks into it and stirs the dregs round with her spoon. She looks up again, meeting his eyes. She gives a nervous half-laugh and drops her eyes. HEATH puts his cup down, watching her steadily. KATE grows more uneasy.)

HEATH. Do you believe in love at first sight ?

KATE. Yes—no—that is—I don't know.

HEATH. It's the only real love, isn't it ?

KATE. Yes.

HEATH. You see some one pass, and all of a sudden, you get such a funny feeling in your throat.

KATE (putting her hand to her heart). Yes—and here.

HEATH. Yes, and here. (Rubs his knee.) Doesn't love at first sight catch you in your knees ? (With enthusiasm.) And isn't it all grand and exciting and the only thing worth living for ?

KATE (*sadly*). And isn't it soon over?

HEATH. It always *is*, but don't you feel that it needn't be, and that when you meet the perfect companion—it won't be?

KATE (*responding earnestly*). Yes—

HEATH (*pauses before he says, simply*). I'm in love with you.

KATE (*disconcerted and troubled*). Please—don't.

HEATH. You must have seen it.

KATE. But—how can you—yet?

HEATH. It takes no time to fall in love.

KATE. You've spoilt everything by saying that—now.

HEATH. I shall never be more sure than now.

KATE. But it's beginning at the wrong end to be lovers before you know if you can be friends.

HEATH. Oh, no. If we are lovers we shall be friends. We can if we try. But we might be the best of friends, we couldn't become lovers with trying. So it's beginning at the right end to be lovers first.

KATE (*after a moment's reflection*). I'm sure that's not sound logic.

HEATH. Love isn't logical.

KATE (*turns to him slowly*). But if you were in love with a woman you hardly knew, as you say you are now— (*Pauses.*)

HEATH (*sincerely*). I shouldn't care how wicked or married she was. I should leave everything to follow her.

KATE (*with enthusiasm*). That's the way to love, isn't it?

HEATH (*leaning towards her*). It's the way I love you. (*She looks away from him.*) Would you have to know everything about a man before you could care for him?

KATE (*looking straight before her*). No. If I loved him I could forgive him everything. But— (*Her voice breaks with emotion.*) I never thought any one would love me like that. (*He puts his hand over hers, which she rests on the table. She rises, half-afraid, looking at him and withdrawing her hand.*) Oh, but you don't mean it. (*He rises and goes towards her. She moves a little away, putting out her hands, imploring him not to approach her.*) Please, please. (*He goes slowly to the window and looks out.*)

HEATH. It's going to rain.

(The stage has gradually grown darker as if heavy thunder-clouds were gathering.)

KATE *(hurriedly)*. I must go. *(She goes to get her hat and sunshade. A distant rumble of thunder is heard.)*

HEATH. There's going to be a storm. *(Turns to her.)* You can't go till it passes.

KATE *(nervously; taking her hat in her hand)*. I don't mind walking in the rain, thank you.

HEATH *(going towards her; speaking as a lover)*. The storm might be rough and hurt you. I can't bear to think of the rain falling on you, or the wind blowing your face too hard.

KATE *(looks at him with gratitude and wonder as she lays her hat down again, then says slowly)*. Do you care like that?

HEATH. How can I help caring? Doesn't every one love you? *(Takes her hand.)*

KATE *(slowly, with a faint smile)*. Yes. But I don't think there's any one else who'd think it mattered if I got caught in the rain.

HEATH *(close to her, bends over her as he speaks, taking her hands in his. She looks at him half-charmed and half-afraid)*. I'll take care of you. I'll shelter you.

KATE *(hurriedly)*. No, no. We mustn't.

HEATH *(speaking in his soft lover's voice as his arms close around her)*. I want to shelter you always. *(Drawing her closer and turning her towards him.)* I love you!

KATE *(breathlessly, alarmed, but yielding gradually to his fascination)*. Oh—but—what are we doing?

(He folds his arms fast round her. His face is close to hers. He looks in her eyes. He kisses her slowly on the mouth. She yields herself to him entirely. A peal of thunder surprises them. She draws herself away from him at the sound of it. She sinks into a chair, bursts into tears, buries her face on her arms and sobs. HEATH goes quietly to the window, closes it, and comes back to KATE. She is sobbing bitterly. HEATH takes her hand in his and holds it.)

KATE. No, no, you don't mean it. *(She rises to her feet and moves away from him, speaking excitedly.)* You're

making love to me to see me yield. And then you'll despise me—and laugh at me. (*He turns from her, looking very troubled.*) You're laughing now. (*He turns his troubled face towards her. She softens instantly.*) Oh! (*She becomes penitent.*) Forgive me, please, please forgive me. (*He puts his arms about her; she looks in his face.*) I could love you so much. (*Slowly pushing him from her.*) If I thought—— (*Dubiously, as she looks searchingly at him.*) If I was sure—— (*Pauses. He looks at her before he speaks gently and earnestly.*)

HEATH. I feel you are sincere because I've looked into your eyes. That's the only way lovers can ever *know*.

KATE (*turns to him responsively, then stops doubtfully*). But you say that as if you'd had a great deal of experience.

HEATH. I'll tell you the truth. Once for a long time I thought I was in love, but now I know that I never loved any one but you.

KATE (*joyfully looking in his face, draws suddenly back from him, doubtful again.*) Oh, but they always say that. (*With a miserable little laugh.*) I'm not quite so simple as—as not to know that there are men who make love out of curiosity. Who try to kiss a woman, not because they want to, but to see if she will or she won't. (*Moves away from him.*)

HEATH. I say, you know, it's not fair of you to take it for granted that I don't mean what I say, because—I do.

KATE (*comes impulsively towards him, putting her hands on his arms*). I want you all to myself. (*Holding him.*) You'll never kiss another woman, will you?

HEATH (*smiling*). Never.

KATE (*impulsively*). You won't even speak to one, or look at one.

HEATH. No, dear, no.

KATE (*breaking away from him*). Oh, how do I know you won't?

(*He holds her firmly by the wrist, not letting her move away.*)

HEATH (*almost sternly*). You don't know. You've got to *trust* me.

KATE (*turns to him, arrested by his authority, becomes submissive*). Yes, I will. I'm not usually an angry

woman, but I'm so afraid of losing you and I think I'm a little excited. (*There is another flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder. She puts her hands over her eyes.*) Oh, that lightning. It makes me so nervous.

(*He goes quietly towards the window. She draws her hands from her eyes. Starts with alarm at seeing he is not at her side, then turns towards him excitedly.*)

KATE. What are you doing ?

HEATH. I'm going to draw the curtains so that you won't see the lightning.

(*He draws the curtains. KATE looks at him suspiciously. She quickly lights the candles.*)

HEATH (*as he turns from the window and sees her lighting the candles.*) Yes, that's a good idea. Now we shan't see it so much. (*She looks at him suspiciously, her face strongly illuminated by the light of the candles.*) What is it ?

KATE. I thought you were going to make the room dark so that you could slip out and leave me. (*He turns from her, puzzled what to do. She starts towards him when he turns from her, more excited than ever.*) Why do you turn away ? You're tired of me already. (*He turns towards her imploringly. She draws back.*) No, no. You only turn to me because I ask you. Oh, why did you follow me ? You forced yourself on me. I'd have been strong another time—but I couldn't to-day—I couldn't— (*Sobs hysterically, and sinks upon the settle.* HEATH *watches her gravely till her sobs subside a little. She becomes gradually calm as he speaks to her gently and firmly.*)

HEATH. I shan't force myself upon you any more. But I'll never leave you while you let me stay. You must take my promise for that. If I'd known you for years I couldn't give you more now. You and I both know the real man and woman from the sham. We were quick to recognise each other. I believe in you for ever. You must do the same for me if you want our love to last.

(*She rises and comes towards him, submissively. He holds out his hand to her.*)

KATE. How you must hate me for giving way like this.

HEATH (*gently, as he takes her hands*). No, dear, I understand.

KATE. Do you, *really*?

HEATH. I love you for giving way, because by that I know I was the first.

KATE (*looking in his face*). Yes. You were. (*Fondling his hand in both hers as she speaks*.) And, after all, I suppose you really might fall in love with me at first sight. I did with you.

HEATH (*smiling*). I loved you the minute I got in the railway carriage—no, before—when I put my toe on the step to get in.

KATE (*smiling*). I was the first. I saw you coming down the platform, slantways through the window. Oh! I *was* so afraid you'd go past me.

HEATH. And I was *so* afraid you wouldn't be in the train.

KATE. How could you be? You didn't know me.

HEATH. But I've always been looking out for you. Whenever I start on a journey, or even walking down the street, I scan the people's faces and wonder if one of them is yours. Sometimes I think I see you. She has a little way of inclining as she walks, or tilting her chin, or saying something, or generally of laughing—which makes me think she must be you. I watch my chances and pursue her. But very soon I find out that she isn't you at all. But to-day she *was* you. Oh, I've found you at last. (*He takes her in his arms*.)

KATE. And you won't go away?

HEATH. Never.

(*He kisses her slowly and tenderly, then with their arms about each other they move slowly towards the settle. KATE sits down there, HEATH on a stool at her feet. They settle themselves comfortably, leaning against each other, with hands clasped.*)

KATE. Yes, like this.

HEATH (*dreamily*). We'll pretend we are sitting at home by our own fire. We'll often sit like this—won't we—and listen to the rain? Only it'll be a little house in a wood, like the one the three bears lived in. I'll make it out of branches.

KATE (*softly*). Could we really live in a little house like that?

HEATH. Yes. We'll live all by ourselves. Would you like that?

KATE. Yes. But I'm afraid you'd get tired with only me.

HEATH. No, dear, I wouldn't. If we wanted a little gaiety we could go and call on Mr. and Mrs. Squirrel, or ask Miss Weasel to tea.

KATE. And where would we get our food?

HEATH. We'd ask Mrs. Squirrel the best place to go for nuts, and there'd be a little stream running past our front door where we'd fish in the mornings.

KATE (*very softly*). Can't we go to it now?

HEATH (*closing his eyes*). Yes—as soon as the rain stops.

(*He leans against her with closed eyes as if he were going to sleep. KATE looks dreamily in the fire. They are silent. A clock outside strikes six.*)

KATE (*starts, as if coming out of a dream*). Six. (*Uneasily.*) I'd forgotten about clocks.

HEATH (*without opening his eyes*). There'll be no clocks in the wood.

KATE. We mustn't talk any more nonsense.

HEATH (*looking up at her*). We are talking sense. That's nonsense all the other people talk— (Pointing to window.) Out there in their big, noisy world. They don't know about our little world. (*Sits beside her on the seat, his arm about her.*)

KATE (*troubled; looking away from him*). This isn't the world.

HEATH. No, dear—it's Paradise.

KATE. But we aren't ready for Paradise yet. (*Rises.*) We must go back. Back to life. This isn't life, by a dim light and a drowsy fire. (*She goes to the window and draws the curtain. A pale white light comes from the window and takes away all the warmth from the candle-light and firelight. She turns to him, pointing from the window as she speaks.*) There! That's life out in the storm. If our love is real it will weather the wind and the rain.

HEATH. But let it sit a little longer by the fire first.

KATE (*takes his hands*). No. I must go away. But

we'll take it with us wherever we go. It's going to be an ennobling love to help us when we work, so that we shan't feel ashamed of it when it's time to draw our blinds and light our lamps. It must spend good days to earn its pleasant evenings. Then we'll let it dream a little.

HEATH (*he kisses her hand*). And you'll meet me very soon ?

KATE. Yes.

HEATH. When ?

KATE. A month from to-day ?

HEATH (*protesting*). A month !

KATE. Well—a fortnight.

HEATH. That's too long.

KATE. A week.

HEATH. To-morrow.

KATE. To-morrow at three o'clock.

HEATH. I can't wait so long as that.

KATE. Then make it half-past two.

(*They both laugh. There is a ring at the front-door bell. They both look at each other and become very serious.*)

HEATH. Shall I go and see ?

KATE (*considers a moment*). No, I'll go.

(*KATE goes out, leaving the door ajar. HEATH goes to the door and listens.*)

AMY (*heard outside*). Here you are. I've brought you an umbrella.

HEATH (*greatly disconcerted*). Amy ! How awkward ! What shall I say to her ?

(*He takes his hat quickly from the table and goes to the window, is about to open it when AMY opens the door. He slips behind the window curtain.*)

AMY *enters in her bicycling costume, carrying an umbrella. KATE follows her, trying to conceal her embarrassment.*)

AMY. What a time the storm lasted.

KATE. Yes—didn't it ? (*Looking about furtively, says to herself.*) I wonder where he went.

AMY. Mother thought I'd better come over and see if you were all right, so as soon as it stopped pouring, I got on my bieycle and brought this. (*Lays the umbrella against the seat.*)

KATE (*to herself.*) His hat's gone.

AMY. You must have been awfully dull here by yourself.

KATE. Oh, no, it wasn't so dull.

AMY (*noticing the tea things.*) I see you found some tea things.

KATE. Yes. (*Glancing at the window.*) He must have gone the way he came.

AMY. It looks as if two people had had tea.

KATE (*staring at the table.*) Does it?

AMY (*pointing.*) Two cups.

KATE. Yes, I had two cups. (*Humorously, pointing to cups.*) That's my first cup, and that's my second.

AMY (*laughing.*) Don't be silly.

KATE. Tell me—has Heath been to see you?

AMY. Not yet. Hasn't he been here? (*Goes to the fire.*)

KATE. No. (*Starts suddenly, unperceived by AMY, suspecting the truth. After a momentary look of alarm she becomes composed.*)

AMY (*looking at the fire, says innocently.*) Bobby went to Heath's lodgings and they said he'd come here. I suppose he hadn't got my letter. He ought to have it by now. Let's lock up and go. Did you look and see if the upstairs windows were fastened? (*KATE doesn't heed her; AMY smiles.*) I knew you'd forget. You might just fasten that one (*indicating the window as she goes towards the door*) while I go upstairs. (*Turns at the door, smiling.*) Oh, I've found out who your charming young man in the train was. Can't you guess?

KATE (*trying to conceal her fears.*) No.

AMY. Try.

KATE. I'd rather not.

AMY. Heath.

(AMY goes out laughing. KATE stands motionless.

HEATH comes slowly from behind the curtain and faces her.)

HEATH (*with intense earnestness.*) I'm not—I'm not what you think. She doesn't love me. She drove me away before. It'll soon be all right. I meant every word I said. I'm yours absolutely. I must be your husband and you must be my wife.

(*He approaches her with his arms out. She holds up her hand sternly, forbidding him to touch her.*)

KATE. No !

HEATH (*dropping his hands by his sides*). I mean it. I mean every word I said. You *must* believe me.

KATE (*deliberately*). You were not playing with me ?

HEATH. No—on my soul, no ! I'll tell her now, before you.

KATE. You say you were not playing ?

HEATH. No—no !

KATE (*looks him steadily in the face before she says*). But *I* was.

(*He steps back, dumbfounded and horrified.*)

HEATH. Ah, no !

KATE. Yes, of course. You don't suppose for a moment I thought you were in earnest.

(AMY enters. *She stops on the threshold, surprised and pleased to see HEATH.*)

AMY. Heath ! (*Coming towards him*.) Have you just come ? Did you get my letter ?

HEATH (*whose attitude to AMY is quiet and gentle*). No.

AMY (*simply and penitently*). I wrote to tell you how sorry I was, and to ask you to forgive me. Will you ? (*She holds out her hand to him. He takes it mechanically. She thinks they are reconciled.*) Thank you. (AMY looks towards KATE a little embarrassed.) You know Cousin Kate already, I think.

HEATH (*hurriedly*). Yes, yes. I'll come and see you this evening and explain everything.

AMY (*turning to HEATH, says innocently*). We can do that now. It won't take long.

HEATH (*looking at KATE*). Not here—not yet.

AMY (*following the direction of his eyes*). Oh, I see. You are shy before Cousin Kate.

HEATH. Yes. Wait till this evening. I'll come—this evening.

AMY (*pleasantly*). Very well. Go home and get the letter and then come and see me.

HEATH (*hurriedly*). Yes. I'll do that.

(HEATH goes out right without looking back.)

AMY (*looking after HEATH*). Poor Heath. I suppose he feels rather guilty, too. (With a smile and a sigh of

relief). Oh, well ; it's all right now. Put on your hat, Cousin Kate, while I put these things away.

(Takes up some of the cups, etc., from the table and carries them out. KATE sits forlornly on the settle.)

KATE. Oh, Kate, Kate ! You poor old fool !

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE.—*The same as Act I. About half an hour has elapsed since Act II. The storm being followed by a fine sunset. It grows gradually dusk during the act.*

MRS. SPENCER sits sewing on the sofa. BOBBY is standing at the window. Both are dressed as in Act I.

BOBBY (*calls from the window*). Hullo, Amy!

MRS. SPENCER (*putting down her work*). At last.

BOBBY (*calling from the window*). You'd better hurry up. You'll be late for supper. (*Turns to his mother*.) It's Amy by herself, on her bicycle.

(AMY enters dressed as in Act II. She looks very happy and smiling.)

MRS. SPENCER. Where's Cousin Kate?

AMY. She's coming. I left her to walk. I was in such a hurry to tell you. I've seen Heath.

MRS. SPENCER (*in cheerful anticipation*). Oh, well?

AMY. He came to Owlseot while I was there. He's coming here this evening.

MRS. SPENCER. And how did he seem?

AMY. I think he was rather embarrassed.

MRS. SPENCER. Well, that's no wonder.

AMY. No, and with Cousin Kate there we couldn't say very much, but he said he'd come this evening.

MRS. SPENCER. Dear Amy. (*Embraces her*.) I had a feeling it would all come right when Cousin Kate came.

(AMY turns smiling from MRS. SPENCER to BOBBY.)

BOBBY (*awkwardly*). I say, I'm beastly glad.

AMY. Oh, Bobby!

(AMY pounces on BOBBY and kisses him on the brow. He pushes her away disgusted.)

BOBBY. Oh, don't, Amy.

MRS. SPENCER. Now we can open Mrs. Darbisher's present. (*Goes to the drawer where she put the parcel in Act I., getting it out as she speaks.*) It came about three o'clock, but I didn't tell you. I thought it would only upset you. (*Gives the parcel to AMY, who sits down and unpacks it.* MRS. SPENCER stands beside her, her eyes glistening with curiosity as she watches her.) It's sure to be something handsome from Mrs. Darbisher. It may be an ostrich feather fan, with real tortoise-shell sticks. (*Under the brown paper AMY finds a square cardboard box. She takes off the lid, takes out a fat parcel wrapped in white tissue-paper.*) Oh, it's something squashy—lace—a roll of priceless point de venise. (*AMY takes off the tissue-paper, and holds up a padded satin handkerchief case, elaborately trimmed with lace and four long ribbon ends.* MRS. SPENCER'S face betrays the keenest disappointment when the present is exposed.)

AMY. A handkerchief case.

MRS. SPENCER. She ought to be ashamed to send a home-made thing like that.

AMY. Oh, mother, it's very pretty.

MRS. SPENCER. For a bazaar, yes—but not for a wedding present.

AMY. I think it was very kind of her to remember me at all.

MRS. SPENCER. That's nonsense, Amy. I expected fish-carvers at least from Mrs. Darbisher. But I've noticed that rich people often give the scrubbiest presents.

AMY. Oh, mother!

BOBBY. Let's have a look at it. (*Taking it very carefully in his hands.*) For pocket-handkerchiefs?

MRS. SPENCER. I suppose that's what she meant it for. (*Fingers it contemptuously.*) It's hard to tell. Such a puffy-looking thing.

BOBBY. I'll tell you what it's for. It's to put on your head when you dust. (*He puts it on his head.* AMY makes a grab at him. He jumps away from her. MRS. SPENCER and AMY laugh at him. He ties two of the ribbons under his chin.) These are the strings. (*Tosses the other two over his shoulders.*) And these two are the tails. (*MRS. SPENCER is convulsed with laughter.* AMY goes towards him to take it from him. He dodges her.)

AMY. Don't, Bobby, you'll crush it.

BOBBY (*taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he pretends to dust a chair*). You see you go about in it to do your mornin' dustin' like this. It keeps the dust out of your hair.

AMY (*follows him laughing, but a little alarmed for the safety of the present*). Take it off. (*He runs away from her behind the sofa*.) Catch him, mother. (*They chase BOBBY round the furniture, all three laughing merrily*.)

(KATE appears at the window dressed as before. She looks pale and dejected. She watches them without smiling before they see her. MRS. SPENCER sees her first.)

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, there's Cousin Kate.

(*They stop the chase. KATE comes forward trying to smile*.)

MRS. SPENCER (*out of breath*). What children you must think us, all romping like this, but we're so happy. (*BOBBY throws the handkerchief case over to AMY, who catches it. MRS. SPENCER jumps with fright as it passes her*.) Oh, dear !

AMY (*smiling, as she comes towards KATE*). We're in rather better spirits than when you came, aren't we ?

MRS. SPENCER. We were laughing over one of Amy's wedding presents. (*To AMY*.) Just show Kate that thing Mrs. Darbisher sent you.

AMY. No, mother, dear. You've said quite enough things about it.

(*AMY sits on the sofa and packs up the present*.)

KATE. How d'you do, Bobby ! I haven't seen you.

BOBBY. How d'you do, Cousin Kate ! I saw you when you didn't see me.

KATE. Did you ? Where ?

BOBBY. Gettin' out of the train with Heath.

MRS. SPENCER. How funny you and Heath should travel together, and you'd no idea who he was ?

KATE. No. You never told me he was an Irishman.

MRS. SPENCER. I thought every one knew. (*KATE smiles wearily and lays her sunshade down*.) Kate, you look tired.

KATE. I am rather tired.

MRS. SPENCER. You ought to have rested after your journey.

KATE (*wistfully*). It would have been wiser.

AMY (*smiles*). Such an exciting journey, too. (*Rises, with the parcel*.)

KATE (*smiling at AMY*). Yes.

MRS. SPENCER. You'll feel better after supper.

AMY. Come along, Bobby. We'll put Mrs. Darbisher's present among the rest.

MRS. SPENCER. Yes. *That* ought to make her feel ashamed.

(AMY and BOBBY *go out*. MRS. SPENCER *looks after them, smiling affectionately*.)

MRS. SPENCER. Dear Amy. She's so happy again. You know I said it would be all right when *you* came.

KATE (*earnestly*). I hope it will.

(MRS. SPENCER *impressed by her earnest tone looks hard at her*.)

MRS. SPENCER. Tell me, Kate. Is this something really serious?

KATE. What?

MRS. SPENCER. What you told me before you went to Owlscot. You said you were in love.

KATE. It's all over now.

MRS. SPENCER. Already? I thought it was only just beginning from the way you carried on.

KATE. I lost my head a little, I suppose, but I soon saw it couldn't come to anything.

MRS. SPENCER. I should have thought you'd be the last person in the world to lose your head about a man, with all your experience.

KATE (*trying to speak lightly at the beginning of her speech, but carried away by the intensity of her emotion as she proceeds*). And boasting. I who have written a score of love-scenes to show you how a woman can turn a man round her little finger. I who knew exactly how close the moth dare fly to the flame. It's so easy to be wise about love, if you aren't in love. But when you've given yourself body and soul, you don't stop to think of the effect you are making—you lose yourself—you only see him, him— (*Seeing MRS. SPENCER watching her narrowly, she checks her emotion and says weakly*).—I should think.

MRS. SPENCER. I hoped you'd fallen in love with some one nice that you could marry.

KATE (*gravely*). I shall never marry. (*Trying to*

laugh at herself.) I know they always say that (*gravely*), but I *really* shan't.

MRS. SPENCER. Why not ?

KATE. There are reasons.

MRS. SPENCER. Do you know something against him ?

KATE. Oh, no—nothing.

MRS. SPENCER (*with sympathetic curiosity*). Perhaps he isn't in your own position or can't afford to support you ?

KATE. Oh, that wouldn't matter. Don't let us talk about it. It's a shame to bother you with *my* troubles when you are all so happy.

MRS. SPENCER. But I want you to be happy, too. I should so like to see you well married. I often think you must be lonely living all by yourself.

KATE (*dejectedly*). I have my work.

MRS. SPENCER. I suppose that's it. You won't give up your work for him. I don't see why you can't have both. You could easily arrange to take three or four mornings off a week to write in.

KATE. My dear funny Sarah, don't say any more about it, or you'll make me laugh. (*Cries and turns away from MRS. SPENCER, wiping her eyes.*)

MRS. SPENCER (*affectionately*). Never mind, dear, I daresay it will all work out right. We shall soon be having another wedding.

KATE (*through her tears*). I shall never have a wedding.

MRS. SPENCER. Is he married ?

KATE. No.

MRS. SPENCER. Engaged ?

KATE. Yes—he's engaged.

MRS. SPENCER. Then he must break it off.

KATE. But what about *her* ?

MRS. SPENCER. I'm sure she wouldn't make him half as good a wife as you would.

KATE. You can talk like that about her if she's some one you never saw or heard of, but not if she's an alive person—that you love.

MRS. SPENCER. That makes a difference, doesn't it ? It wouldn't matter if she was just Miss Jones or Miss Smith, but—if it were Amy for instance.

KATE (*sighing*). Yes,—if—it were Amy.

MRS. SPENCER. Poor Kate.

KATE (*bravely blinking back her tears*). Oh, well, I'm not the first woman who gave her heart to the wrong man. I shan't die of it. (*Breaking down.*) I wish I could.

(AMY and BOBBY enter. KATE goes out quickly without noticing them. BOBBY closes the door after her.)

BOBBY and AMY (*looking after KATE*). What's the matter with Cousin Kate?

MRS. SPENCER. She's caught a chill. (*To AMY.*) What time is Heath coming?

AMY. He didn't say. I suppose he'll come as soon as he has changed his things.

MRS. SPENCER. He may not come till after supper if we don't ask him. Bobby, run round to Heath's lodgings and say we expect him to supper. We'll put it half an hour later to give him time.

BOBBY. All right. (*Goes out at the window.*)

MRS. SPENCER. We must give Heath a rousing welcome. I'll put on my black silk, and you can wear your new christaline muslin. I hope the fowl will go round. (*Her attention is attracted by something outside.*) Oh, there's Mr. Bartlett coming round the corner. I wonder where he is going. (*Goes to the window.*)

AMY (*embarrassed*). I expect he's coming here.

MRS. SPENCER. He wouldn't come here at supper time.

AMY. Yes, I asked him—a long time ago—before Cousin Kate came.

(MRS. SPENCER turns to AMY, *visibly annoyed*.)

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, Amy! And I thought we were going to have such a nice little supper all by ourselves, and now—with Mr. Bartlett here—we can't laugh.

AMY. It can't be helped now.

MRS. SPENCER. It could have been helped before.

AMY. Shall I tell Jane to excuse us?

MRS. SPENCER (*wavering*). I wonder. Do you think we could? (*Bows and smiles amiably from the window.*) Good-evening, Mr. Bartlett. (*Turns gloomily to AMY.*) It's too late now. I suppose there's nothing for it but to look as if we were expecting him. (*Sits down, looking very cross.*) The fowl won't go round.

AMY (*looking anxiously at her mother*). Do say something pleasant and put him at his ease.

(JANE enters.)

JANE. Mr. Bartlett!

(MR. BARTLETT enters. MRS. SPENCER rises and greets him with cordiality, shakes his hand. JANE goes out.)

MRS. SPENCER. Well, Mr. Bartlett, this is a pleasant surprise.

AMY. Not a surprise, mother.

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, no—— (*with a look at Amy*). No, of course not. We've been waiting a long time.

BARTLETT. I'm afraid I'm late.

MRS. SPENCER (*confused*). Oh, no, but——

AMY (*coming to the rescue*). She means Heath. He's coming to supper. That is our pleasant surprise.

(BARTLETT looks gravely at AMY. She returns his look, then turns away.)

MRS. SPENCER (*to Amy*). Yes. (To BARTLETT.) I didn't mean *you* were a pleasant surprise.

(AMY and MRS. SPENCER give an awkward laugh.)

AMY. Oh, mother. (*Hurriedly to MRS. SPENCER*.) I'll tell Jane to set two extra places.

(AMY goes out. MRS. SPENCER and MR. BARTLETT sit down together.)

BARTLETT (*impressively*). I presume I am correct in surmising that Mr. Desmond's escapade is forgiven?

MRS. SPENCER. Well, yes. Amy saw him this afternoon at Owlscot and they seem to have made it up.

BARTLETT. Does she know about that conversation you and I had before she sent her letter to him?

MRS. SPENCER (*smiling uneasily*). Well, no. You see the engagement was never really broken off, so I couldn't very well say anything—could I? No.

BARTLETT. There was a distinct understanding between us that she should be given her choice.

MRS. SPENCER. I suppose there was—in a way. (JANE enters, with a lamp turned low, which she sets on the table. MRS. SPENCER, relieved by this interruption, exclaims cheerfully.) Oh, here's Jane with the lamp. (*Springing up*.) Now, Mr. Bartlett, perhaps you would like to smoke while we are dressing. You do smoke, don't you?

BARTLETT (*in his genial manner, because of JANE's presence*). I occasionally indulge in a weed.

MRS. SPENCER. We allow smoking—in the summer house.

(BARTLETT *goes out by the window, taking a cigar from his pocket. JANE is absorbed, turning up the lamp, peering closely at it. KATE enters in the same dress, but without her hat.*)

KATE. I think I left my sunshade here.

MRS. SPENCER. Did you, dear ?

(MRS. SPENCER *goes out.*)

KATE. Have you seen it, Jane ?

JANE (*taking the sunshade from the desk*). Here it is, Miss.

KATE (*taking it from JANE*). Thank you.

JANE (*grinning*). I thought it didn't look like one of ours. We always get a sight of the fashions when *you* come. (KATE *is about to go to the door and stops when JANE speaks.*) We shall be quite a party at supper, Miss.

KATE. Why ? Who's coming ?

JANE. There's Mr. Bartlett, and Mr. 'eath——

KATE (*aside*). Heath. (To JANE.) Come to my room and tell me as soon as he comes.

JANE. Yes, Miss. (*The front door bell rings.*) I expect that's him now.

KATE (*giving her sunshade to JANE*). Please put this in the hall.

(JANE *takes the sunshade and goes out.*)

KATE (*talking to herself to control herself*). Keep your head, Kate—be brave, dear ; he mustn't think you care. Don't cry—for goodness' sake, don't cry.

(HEATH *enters. He now wears a blue serge suit.*)

HEATH. Ah ! Now we have a chance to explain ourselves while they are dressing.

KATE (*controlling her emotion successfully during the early part of the scene*). I have explained myself.

HEATH. No, you haven't.

KATE. I only want to add that I feel very much ashamed ; I should never have done what I did if I'd known you were engaged to Amy. I waited here now to ask you what you are going to say to her.

HEATH. That depends on *you*.

KATE (*alarmed, but trying to hide it*). You must keep me out of your reckoning altogether.

HEATH. I can't. I've been thinking it all over this last half-hour, and I see that you must have been in earnest. No one could act love like that. It wouldn't be worth while.

KATE (*assuming flippancy*). Except to a novelist getting copy.

HEATH. Please don't talk that way about it.

KATE (*facing him*). We must understand each other now.

HEATH. You mean you were just dissecting emotion, analysing passion—for experience—to put in a book?

KATE (*uneasily*). Yes—that was it.

HEATH. If you meant to amuse yourself, making a fool of me—

KATE (*interrupting*). I'm sorry I hurt you.

HEATH. Yes, but why did you try to stop me coming in the house—why did you keep me at arm's length for ever so long?

KATE (*uneasily; assuming flippancy*). It's part of the game to seem reluctant at first.

HEATH (*abruptly*). Why did you tremble so when I touched your hand?

KATE (*taken aback by his abrupt question*). Did I?

HEATH. Yes, and you stammered and flushed.

KATE. I had to keep saying to myself—"Now what would a woman who really felt it all do here?" She'd tremble and stammer—she'd—

HEATH (*watching her calmly*). That's silly.

KATE. It's my explanation. (*Sits down, looking away from him*.)

HEATH. She might tremble and stammer intentionally, but she couldn't flush unless she felt. No one can. You were afraid then, *really* afraid. You started to go, but you didn't go—you stayed. Oh, no, you weren't playing then.

KATE. One must be a little bit in earnest or there's no excitement in flirtation.

HEATH. If ours was a flirtation, what is there left for love?

KATE. Did I flirt so well you couldn't tell the difference?

HEATH. You didn't flirt fair. Flirtation is a game with rules, and you cheated.

KATE. I've told you I'm ashamed. Won't you accept my apology?

HEATH (*hardens his face and his voice, going a step to her as he speaks*). Shall I tell you what I think of a woman who deliberately sets to work to steal a man's love—without pity or passion, just to try her power and satisfy her vanity?

KATE (*falteringly*). You can if you like. I daresay I've deserved it.

(HEATH *looks at her in silence; then his face relaxes. He speaks with a sudden burst of genuine emotion*.)

HEATH. Oh, I—I don't believe it of you. I've only to look at you to see you aren't a fraud. (KATE *keyed up to hear him denounce her is thrown off her guard by his unexpected speech. She looks up at him gratefully. He kneels beside her speaking with increasing emotion*.) I know you love me. I never opened my heart to any one as I did to you. It seems so natural to say everything to you, just as I think of it. I'd be ashamed to talk such foolishness to anybody else—(*smiling at her*)—about Silverloeks and the squirrels and our little house in the wood.

KATE (*puts out her hand as if to stop him speaking*). Listen. Let me tell you. When I found out that you were Amy's lover, I was so afraid. I thought I'd taken you from her. So I pretended I'd only been flirting. I thought it was the only way to end it. But I can't do it any more. (*She rises, moving about as she speaks. He rises, too, watching her*). We might have known it would come to no good, beginning like that.

HEATH (*half-sitting on the edge of the table in the same attitude and speaking with the same tone of enthusiasm as he spoke a similar speech near the beginning of Act II., that he recalls, now unconsciously, reproducing the same effect*.) It began so perfectly, didn't it? How we flew through the woods and over the towns—a god and a goddess dropped from two planets, do you remember?

KATE (*very seriously, facing him*). But now we've facts to face, not romances.

HEATH (*with enthusiasm*). The beauty of it is that

you and I can turn facts into romances. A third-class railway carriage becomes a royal chariot when we ride in it together. I think our meeting was the greatest thing that ever happened in this world.

KATE. To us, but only to us. The world didn't cry for joy when we met. It was only you and I.

HEATH (*quietly*). You know Amy did tell me she couldn't marry me unless I changed.

KATE. Be patient with her. She's young yet, and she's sorry. She's getting all ready for her wedding. You can't leave her now.

HEATH. It isn't that I don't care what becomes of Amy. I've tried very hard to be fair to her—I gave her a chance to call me back if she wanted me.

KATE. She did call you back.

HEATH. Not for a long time. I waited more than an hour.

KATE. An hour! That's not long in a lifetime.

HEATH. It's long in the crisis of a lifetime. If I'd told you I considered myself free if you didn't call me back at once, you wouldn't have kept me waiting a whole hour before you sent. You'd have come yourself—wouldn't you?

(*Comes close to her.*)

KATE (*firmly*). I can't marry you.

HEATH (*with sudden alarm*). You're not engaged?

KATE. No.

HEATH (*relieved*). Ah! You gave me such a start for a moment.

KATE. But I can't take you from her. You don't know how this little family trust me. They said things would be better when I came. And just now, after Amy had seen you, they were all so happy again. All their clouds had gone and they said Cousin Kate had rolled them away, so how could I be the one to take you from them?

HEATH. But there's you and I, too, with long lives to live. Think what they'll be if we live them together. Think what they'll be if we don't. I want to do the straight thing. I'm sure it's more honest to tell Amy the truth. (MR. BARTLETT *slowly passes the window without, smoking.*) There's Bartlett, I'll ask him. (Goes to the window.)

KATE (*alarmed*). No.

HEATH. Why not? I won't mention your name, of course.

KATE. But you and I don't go by what *he* says.

HEATH. No, but *they* do. (*Goes to the window and calls.*) Bartlett! (*MR. BARTLETT throws end of cigar away and enters by the window.*) I've got rather a hard nut to crack, and I want to ask you what you think. You know about me going away, and—it wasn't all my fault, but after I went—well, the fact is I've fallen in love with somebody else and I want to know what you think I ought to do?

BARTLETT (*impressively*). This is a most grievous state of affairs.

HEATH. Yes, but there isn't time for all that. I must meet Amy in a minute. I think I ought to tell her the truth, and— (*indicating KATE*) she thinks I ought not to. What do *you* think?

BARTLETT. I think a man should speak the truth at all seasons.

HEATH. Now, that makes me hesitate. When I see my duty and inclination looking the same, I always begin to suspect myself.

BARTLETT. Before I knew what your inclination was I thought it advisable to break off this engagement. I said so when I brought your message.

HEATH. Did you tell Amy so?

BARTLETT. I was prepared to do so, but I was not allowed.

HEATH. Why?

BARTLETT (*indicating KATE*). This lady can tell you. She was with Miss Spencer when she wrote that letter I brought you.

HEATH (*to KATE*). Did you urge her to write it?

KATE. I only put the case plainly before her. She made her own choice.

BARTLETT (*with repressed resentment*). You took great pains to prevent me seeing her.

KATE (*answering him in the same tone*). Because you were trying to take an unfair advantage of her.

BARTLETT. Really, I must take exception—

KATE (*interrupting him*). There's no time to mince matters. The happiness of this whole family is at stake

—more than that—their faith in all human nature through us three. I can't stand seeing their hearts broken by our selfishness.

BARTLETT (*solemnly*). I am not actuated by selfishness in the discharge of my duties.

KATE (*turning on him indignantly*). You don't see through yourself. You are so sure of your own goodness you never search your motives. You smother them up with long words and tell yourself you are doing the Will of Heaven—because it suits you. You're not honest with yourself—

MRS. SPENCER (*calling off stage*). Amy !

KATE (*imploringly to HEATH*). She's coming.

AMY (*calling off stage*). I'm coming.

BARTLETT (*going close to HEATH*). If you wish to break your engagement now, I am ready to propose to her myself.

HEATH. You want to strike a bargain with me. No, I'm—no. I won't— (To KATE.) You are right ; I'll keep my promise to Amy. (Enter MRS. SPENCER in her black silk, followed by AMY in her new dress, then BOBBY, in an Eton suit. They all smile with embarrassment and come in a procession towards HEATH. BOBBY closes the door.)

MRS. SPENCER (*holding out her hand to HEATH*). Welcome home.

BARTLETT (*standing behind a chair, speaks with serious formality so that they all turn to him*). Mrs. Spencer, Miss Spencer, all of you. It will soon be my solemn task to say to the congregation, " If any man can show any just cause why these two persons may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

MRS. SPENCER. What do you mean ?

BARTLETT. Mr. Desmond has just made me a confession. If he will not repeat it, the painful duty devolves upon me.

AMY (*stepping forward*). No, I don't want to hear it. If Heath has done anything he's ashamed of, he'll tell me and I'll forgive him. He has plenty of things to forgive me, I'll gladly forgive him one.

(MR. BARTLETT turns and goes slowly into the garden.
KATE comes towards AMY and embraces her.)

KATE (*brokenly*). Bless you, Amy.

MRS. SPENCER (*taking her cue from KATE, presses HEATH's hand*). Bless you, Heath. Mr. Bartlett always upsets me so. He has no tact. (*Turns to AMY.*) I suppose he'll still stay to supper.

(*Goes out. BOBBY follows her.*)

AMY (*smiling at KATE*). Congratulate Heath, too.

(*KATE and HEATH grasp hands, looking steadily at each other for a moment. Then KATE withdraws her hand and goes out.*)

AMY (*crossing to the sofa*). Heath! (*HEATH sits on the sofa with AMY.*) Before you confess to me, I think I had better confess to you. I have been guilty of a very grave offence since you went away.

HEATH (*dejectedly*). I seem to have been born to make trouble.

AMY. It was in the midst of my uncertainty—not knowing if you would come back or not—some one came and spoke to me in a way I ought not to have allowed, because I was still engaged to you. (*Falteringly.*) And I let him go on.

HEATH. Do you mean he asked you to marry him?

AMY. He was beginning to. Then Cousin Kate came.

HEATH. So he didn't finish?

AMY. No.

HEATH. Then what have I got to blame you for?

AMY. My wicked thoughts. (*HEATH gives a quaint tired look away from her.*) If Cousin Kate hadn't come he would have finished.

HEATH. And you would have accepted him?

AMY (*hanging her head*). Yes.

HEATH (*distressed*). To think I should almost have driven you to marry a man you didn't love.

AMY (*in mild reproach*). Oh, Heath! I should never sink so low as that.

HEATH (*taken aback, smiles, and turns to look at her.*) Do you love him?

AMY. I felt as if I could then, but now—I have succeeded in banishing him completely from my mind.

HEATH. Am I standing between you and him?

AMY. No, Heath. There is no question of that. He had no right to speak to me, and I had no right to

listen. I shall never so forget myself again. I am quite ready to become your wife.

HEATH. But I don't want you to sacrifice yourself.

AMY. I am sure you will do everything to make me happy.

HEATH. But if he could make you happier—

AMY. Oh, Heath, I don't want to spoil your life.

HEATH. Thank you very much. And of course I don't want to spoil yours. You know you haven't been quite satisfied with me. You wanted me to change.

AMY. I see now that it was presumption for a girl like me to speak so to a man like you. You are so good and clever and I've never been anywhere particular. You know we must expect to make compromises when we marry. I am prepared to do this.

HEATH. Yes, but ought you to ?

AMY. I think I shall get into Heaven sooner by keeping my promises to you than by thinking only of my own soul. Oh, you needn't be afraid that I shall take my promise back now.

HEATH. Suppose I release you from it—suppose that you'd never made it—and that I and this other man came and offered you marriage. Which of us would you choose ?

AMY (*hanging her head*). I haven't thought.

HEATH (*smiles*). Do think. It's really rather important.

AMY. I know it's very wrong to feel as I do.

HEATH (*kindly*). No, it isn't. We can't any of us help feeling as we do.

AMY. You see, it's this way. I think perhaps I'm more cut out for a clergyman's wife—than an artist's.

HEATH. Is the clergyman more cut out for you than the artist is ? That's what I want to get at.

AMY. I can't help feeling that he and I have more in common than you and I have.

HEATH. Yes, but if you were free now—would he finish what he was saying when Cousin Kate came ?

AMY. I think so.

HEATH. You are free if you wish it.

AMY (*relieved*). Oh, Heath, how generous you are ! (*He smiles at her and takes her hand as a friend. She*

looks at him seriously.) It doesn't seem to hurt you as much as I feared.

HEATH (*gravely and kindly*). Isn't it better for neither of us to have anything to reproach the other with?

AMY (*awkwardly*). Yes—thank you— (*Draws her hand away.*) Thank you.

HEATH (*embarrassed*). Not at all. (*He wanders away and sits at some distance from AMY.*)

(*A gong sounds.*)

AMY. That's for supper.

MRS. SPENCER (*heard off*). Now, then, you two, I'm coming. (*Poking her head in playfully at the door, before she enters, expecting to surprise them in an affectionate attitude. She is greatly surprised to find them seated far apart.*) Well! That's a new-fashioned way for an engaged couple to sit. (HEATH and AMY rise, embarrassed.)

(Enter MRS. SPENCER and BOBBY, followed by KATE.)

MR. BARTLETT *enters at the window.*)

AMY (*awkwardly*). We are not an engaged couple.

MRS. SPENCER (*amazed*). What!

HEATH. Amy finds she isn't cut out for an artist's wife.

AMY. So Heath has very kindly released me from my engagement—Y-es—

(*There is an uncomfortable pause. Then AMY hastens into the garden. MR. BARTLETT, after a circular glance at the others, follows her.*)

MRS. SPENCER (*with her back to AMY and MR. BARTLETT, as they go out*). Whose fault is it? Mr. Bartlett's, I suppose. Oh, Mr. Bartlett, I forgot you were here. (*Looks round the room.*) Where is he?

BOBBY. Out in the garden with Amy.

(MRS. SPENCER *marches straight towards the window.*)

HEATH (*preventing her from going out*). Don't interrupt them. They love each other. She told me so a moment ago.

MRS. SPENCER. Oh, Kate! What shall we do?

KATE. Leave them.

MRS. SPENCER. You know you can't bear him.

KATE. That's no reason why Amy shouldn't love him. He's a good man. I haven't the least doubt that he is held in the highest esteem all over the parish. She'll

love, honour and obey him and never see through him—and then, he's her choicer.

(AMY and BARTLETT enter at the window.)

AMY (comes towards MRS. SPENCER). Mother, James has something to say to you.

MRS. SPENCER (severely). Who's James? (AMY indicates BARTLETT, who stands smiling in an embarrassed manner in the background. MRS. SPENCER takes AMY on one side.) But, Amy, it looks so fast for you to be engaged to one man one moment and another one the next. I don't like it.

(JANE bursts in.)

JANE. Please, mum, the fowl's growing cold.

MRS. SPENCER. We're coming. (JANE goes out, leaving the door open. MRS. SPENCER turns to MR. BARTLETT.) Will you take Amy in to supper—James? (HEATH and KATE both give a smothered laugh. BARTLETT smiles at AMY. MRS. SPENCER says sympathetically to HEATH.) Heath, will it be too painful for you to remain?

HEATH (smiling). I'll try to bear it.

MRS. SPENCER. Then please bring Cousin Kate. (Turns to BOBBY.) The fowl will have to go round.

(MRS. SPENCER goes out with BOBBY. MR. BARTLETT smilingly offers his arm to AMY. They go out together, leaving HEATH and KATE alone, facing each other.)

HEATH. Now, will you marry me?

KATE. Shure, and I will.

(They go out arm in arm.)

CURTAIN.

LADY EPPING'S LAWSUIT

A SATIRICAL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

COPY OF THE "FIRST NIGHT" PROGRAMME

AT THE

CRITERION THEATRE, LONDON

LADY EPPING'S LAWSUIT

A SATIRICAL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

PERFORMED FOR THE FIRST TIME

ON OCTOBER 12, 1908

<i>Countess of Epping</i>	.	.	.	MISS MARY MOORE
<i>Lady Lucy Lister</i>	.	.	.	MISS ELFRI DA CLEMENT
<i>Lady Beacroft</i>	.	.	.	MISS ANNE CLEAVER
<i>Evelyn Hughes</i>	.	.	.	MISS GRACE LANE
<i>Miss Vanderh ide</i>	.	.	.	MISS NORMA WHALLEY
<i>Miss Berengaria Mortimer</i>	.	.	.	MRS. SAM SOTHERN
<i>Miss Ferris</i>	.	.	.	MISS FRANCES VINE
<i>Earl of Epping</i>	.	.	.	MR. JOHN TOKE
<i>Lord Oswald Bruce-Bannerman</i>	.	.	.	MR. WALTER PEARCE
<i>Mr. Justice Wray</i>	.	.	.	MR. ERIC LEWIS
<i>Mr. Craven, K.C.</i>	.	.	.	MR. BERTE THOMAS
<i>Mr. Clinton Perry</i>	.	.	.	MR. FERDINAND GOTTSCHALK
<i>Mr. Paul Hughes</i>	.	.	.	MR. SAM SOTHERN
<i>Rev. Dr. Gull</i>	.	.	.	MR. COOPER
<i>Mr. Pearson</i>	.	.	.	MR. REGINALD BESANT
<i>Henry</i>	.	.	.	MR. LAWRENCE WHITE
<i>Mr. Hickory</i>	.	.	.	MR. ARTHUR HARE
<i>Associate in Court Room</i>	.	.	.	MR. THOMAS BRAIDON
<i>Usher</i>	.	.	.	MR. TOOSE
<i>Barristers, solicitors, clerks, pressmen, footmen, and the general public</i>				

Act I.—The Drawing-room at Epping House.

Act II.—The Library of Lord Epping's House in Berkeley Square.

Act III.—Court-room X King's Bench Division.

LADY EPPING'S LAWSUIT

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at Epping House. Two large French windows at the back which being open show an extensive view of lawns, flower gardens, and trees. There is a door on the right. The furniture and hangings are of rich pale green brocade. There is a settee large enough to take two people easily, three at a pinch, and about the room are chairs, tables, and the usual furniture of such a room. It is about five o'clock in the afternoon of a fine summer Sunday.*

As the curtain rises EVELYN HUGHES, a pretty young woman, is seated on the sofa reading a book. JOHN enters.

JOHN. If you please, mum, there's a Miss Ferris called.

EVELYN. You'd better tell her ladyship ; she's in the garden.

JOHN. She's asking for Mr. Paul Hughes.

EVELYN. Oh ! What does she look like ?

(Enter MISS FERRIS. Exit JOHN. MISS FERRIS is a hustling blonde about thirty-five. She is rather overdressed in a cheap way. Several attempts at the latest fashions but not too unlikely. She comes to EVELYN and offers her hand. Her manner is extremely genial and effusive.)

MISS FERRIS. Are you Mrs. Hughes ?

EVELYN. Yes.

MISS FERRIS. His wife, of course.

EVELYN. I am my husband's wife.

MISS FERRIS. How proud you must be of him !

EVELYN. Very.

MISS FERRIS. What a success it was ! A veritable triumph ! No more slump in the British Drama now that your husband has come to the rescue. After such a play as *Glass Houses*—his first play too—I feel sure that he will soar to the topmost pinnacle of fame. But I'd better introduce myself.

EVELYN. Please.

MISS FERRIS. I am *The Gentleman's Friend*.

EVELYN (quite shocked). I beg your pardon.

MISS FERRIS. The new paper of that nomenclature.

EVELYN. Oh, yes. How kind of you to come and congratulate us.

MISS FERRIS (*they are both seated by now*). I am proud to have this opportunity of doing so—as an English-woman—as one who was present on the first night of *Glass Houses*. I was so excited when the author was called that I am told I stood up and waved my mouchoir. I daresay you saw me. I was in the dress circle.

EVELYN. I don't think I saw anything just then.

MISS FERRIS. I was so afraid the papers would mention it—but they didn't.

EVELYN. The papers have been so good to us.

MISS FERRIS. All the best critics liked the play.

EVELYN. But better still—all the worst ones *disliked* it.

MISS FERRIS. I see where your husband gets some of his trenchant wit.

EVELYN. Oh, no. He wrote his play all himself.

MISS FERRIS. Really—how interesting—because, as you know, whenever a man succeeds the world always asks who the woman was. But we mustn't sit gossiping.

EVELYN. Why not ?

MISS FERRIS. I am here professionally.

EVELYN. Oh !

MISS FERRIS. To interview your husband.

EVELYN (embarrassed). Oh, how kind, but unfortunately he has made it a rule never to be interviewed.

MISS FERRIS. But I have an appointment with him.

EVELYN. It *must* be a mistake.

MISS FERRIS. He made it himself. Yes. He wrote to me before he left London and said he would be spending Saturday to Monday at Epping House and could give

me a few minutes after luncheon on Sunday if I came down.

(She moves to the window.)

EVELYN. I'd better go and ask him. Will you excuse me?

MISS FERRIS *(cheerfully)*. Certainly, dear, certainly. *(EVELYN goes out into the garden. MISS FERRIS takes out her note-book and pencil, and writes in shorthand as she speaks in a dry tone.)* "I was shown into the palatial drawing-room at Epping House where Mr. Paul Hughes was spending Saturday to Monday as the guest of the Earl of Epping and his elegant and accomplished countess. For an hour or so I sat chatting with our dramatist's charming wife. The time passed so agreeably that I had almost forgotten my mission till my eye lit on the handsome ormolu clock which adorned the mantel. 'Tempus fugit,' I said, laughing. Mrs. Hughes laughed too, and just then—"

(PAUL HUGHES enters from the garden followed by EVELYN. PAUL is a man about thirty. He looks like any other well-dressed, well-bred London man, and shows no signs of being an author either in dress or manner. He comes to MISS FERRIS and they shake hands.)

PAUL. Good-afternoon. It's very good of you to come all this way. I hope you are going to let me off easily.

MISS FERRIS *(laughing)*. Oh, that's very good. "Let me off easily"; I must jot that down. *(Makes a shorthand note.)* "Let me off easily." I should like to hear that spoken from the stage. *(PAUL glances at EVELYN and smiles.)* Suppose we begin—"No one was more surprised than I that the public should see anything in my poor little play."

(She writes in her note-book.)

PAUL *(embarrassed)*. Oh—well—if you like.

EVELYN. Paul! You are *not* going to let that go in? We always *knew* you'd have a great success.

PAUL. Yes, dear, but that wouldn't look well in an interview. *(Quickly to MISS FERRIS.)* Don't say I said that.

MISS FERRIS. Very well. What decided you to adopt the career of a dramatist?

PAUL. Want of cash.

EVELYN. Ambition.

(*She thumps PAUL.*)

PAUL (*hastily*). Oh, yes—ambition.

MISS FERRIS (*writing*). “The fierce devouring flame of creation burning within me.”

PAUL. Don’t make it look as if *I* said that. It sounds so silly. Make it look as if *you* said it.

EVELYN (*to PAUL*). Wouldn’t you like to write your own interview, Paul?

PAUL (*in a whisper to EVELYN as MISS FERRIS writes*). Take care, dear. All this is going into print. I want you to appear as the humble and adoring wife of a man of genius.

MISS FERRIS. It may truthfully be said “you awoke to find yourself famous.”

EVELYN. He knew it before he went to sleep.

MISS FERRIS. Now something about early struggles.

PAUL. I’m sorry to say I never starved in a garret.

MISS FERRIS. Just as well. The garret is out of date.

PAUL. Of course I worked very hard for ten years or so.

MISS FERRIS (*writing*). Did ten years’ hard labour!

PAUL (*protesting loudly*). No!

MISS FERRIS. Of course not. That would make you appear too old. Can you recall any amusing incident among your early experiences?

PAUL. I—remember one day—when I went fishing—

EVELYN. Don’t attempt it, dear. You are *not* good at stories.

MISS FERRIS. Of course you are besieged by managers?

PAUL (*looking doubtfully at EVELYN*). Er . . .

EVELYN (*promptly to MISS FERRIS*). Yes. You can put *that* in.

MISS FERRIS. Your favourite flower?

PAUL. The petunia.

EVELYN (*thumping him and irritated*). Oh!

MISS FERRIS. Sports and pastimes?

PAUL. I’m fond of riding.

(*While MISS FERRIS makes a note EVELYN speaks in an undertone to PAUL.*)

EVELYN. Darling, I think that sounds a little pretentious when you only had your first lesson last week.

PAUL. Darling, this is my interview. (*To MISS FERRIS.*) I'm rather keen on golf.

MISS FERRIS. A crack golfsman! Now we've heard about your recreations, tell us something about your work. Do you write all night, for instance, with a wet towel round your head?

PAUL. Of course not.

MISS FERRIS. Though we are all so in love with your comedy, Mr. Hughes, we hope you are going to give us a serious play.

PAUL. No one seems to think a play serious unless it's about unpleasant people. However, if you'll give me time I'll show you some most objectionable specimens of both sexes, and prove that all our English principles are wrong. I don't want people to think I have no ideas.

MISS FERRIS. Are you going to write a classic?

PAUL. You can't write a classic till you are dead.

MISS FERRIS. What are your views on the future of the British Drama?

PAUL (*coughing and bracing himself to deliver a speech he has evidently got off by heart.*) The British Drama is passing through a most critical stage. The flippancy of the age and the lateness of dinner are dealing death blows at serious, thoughtful work. But already we behold abundant signs that a brighter epoch is at hand. . . .

MISS FERRIS (*quickly interrupting*). Thank you. Now the snapshots. (*She goes to the door and calls.*) Mr. Pearson!

EVELYN. Snapshots! You are not going to be snapped?

PAUL. It's no use half doing it.

EVELYN. Oh!

(Enter MR. PEARSON. *He is a business-like young man with a camera.*)

MISS FERRIS. This is our Mr. Pearson.

PAUL. How d'you do?

MISS FERRIS. Now—standing up in a natural attitude first. This is "Good-morning. Glad to see you." Look pleasant, please.

(PAUL *obeys instructions.* PEARSON *snaps PAUL with the camera.*)

PEARSON. Thank you.

MISS FERRIS (*pointing to a chair*). Fling yourself down there in a posture of despair for "Oh, dear, I can't work to-day somehow."

PAUL (*obeying instructions*). Will this do? (EVELYN laughs. PAUL glances at EVELYN and laughs.) Don't laugh. I'm trying to look like a great thinker.

MISS FERRIS (*arranging PAUL in a posture of despair with his head on his hand*). A little more so—yes—thank you—let me see—so—yes—thank you.

PEARSON. Ready?

PAUL. 'M!

(PEARSON *snaps the camera at PAUL, then turns to MISS FERRIS*.)

PEARSON. One at the books, don't you think?

MISS FERRIS. Yes. "My silent friends." (To PAUL.) Stand there, please. (*Points to some books*.) One hand on the books. Now—smile intelligently at Mr. Pearson.

(PAUL *smiles intelligently at PEARSON. PEARSON snaps the camera*.)

PEARSON. Thank you.

MISS FERRIS. Shall we do one in the garden?

(PAUL, MISS FERRIS and PEARSON *go towards the window. EVELYN faces them*.)

EVELYN. Oh, no, Paul. Not where all those people can see you.

MISS FERRIS. Just as you like. We can do the one in the garden in the house. (*She points to the sofa*.) Suppose you sit there—in a sprawling summer-like attitude. (PAUL *sprawls on the sofa*.) Mr. Pearson will fill in the shrubs and a sun-dial afterwards. (*She arranges PAUL's head and fingers*.) Frown, please. Remember you've got the sun in your eyes. (PAUL *frowns*.) Very good.

PEARSON. Extremely pretty. (EVELYN *shows signs of great irritation*. PEARSON, *snapping camera at PAUL*.) Thank you.

MISS FERRIS. Now one with your wife.

EVELYN. No!

MISS FERRIS (*joyfully*). One with the baby.

(PAUL and EVELYN *look at each other extremely disconcerted*.)

PAUL. It isn't here.

(PEARSON *smothers a giggle*. MISS FERRIS *frowns at him*.)

MISS FERRIS. Never mind, then. I think we have enough, so I won't take up any more of your *valuable* time.

PAUL (*shaking hands*). Good-bye.

MISS FERRIS. Good-bye. I am sure the public will be deeply impressed by all you've said. Good-day, Mrs. Hughes.

EVELYN (*bowing*). Good-day.

MISS FERRIS. Come, Mr. Pearson.

(*Exit MISS FERRIS. PEARSON bows and follows her off.*)

EVELYN. Oh, the shame—the humiliation!

PAUL. Nonsense, dear. It's nothing worse than a bore.

EVELYN. You *loved* it.

PAUL (*idly turning the pages of a book*). One may as well make the best of it.

EVELYN. But in the old days you said that advertising one's self with interviewers and snapshots was so contemptible.

PAUL. No one wanted to interview me or snap me then.

EVELYN. Don't change, Paul.

PAUL. Of course not, dear—but it's not my fault if the press wants to make an idol of me.

EVELYN (*indignantly*). An idol! You mean an Aunt Sally!

PAUL. Really, Evelyn, I don't think you should speak so to a public man. With new dignities come new duties. They have a right to know exactly what I'm like.

EVELYN. Who?

PAUL. The people!

EVELYN. Oh, Paul—how can you talk like that? The other day a monkey was interviewed—think of it—a monkey.

PAUL. They say it has genius.

EVELYN. Don't laugh at me, darling. I'm so anxious you should avoid making a fool of yourself. I know it's very hard.

PAUL. No, dear—it isn't.

EVELYN. I mean for any one who, like you, has been no one from nowhere all his life, and is suddenly some one everywhere. *I'd* rather pig along as we used to do than that any one should say you have a swollen head.

PAUL. Nonsense, dear. I'm not the least bit of a snob.

EVELYN. Then what are you doing *here*?

PAUL. If Lady Epping was kind enough to ask us——

EVELYN. After meeting us once at a dinner-party. It's such nonsense for you and me to be staying in a house like this—and if you knew how the footmen terrify me.

PAUL. I feel it just as keenly as you do, but we must get used to it.

EVELYN. It'll be the ruin of you if you do. You'll forget the humble human people. You'll go filling your plays full of dukes and duchesses and you'll get so mixed up—you won't know how to make them talk to their servants.

PAUL. I'm observing all that now. I shall be servant-perfect by to-morrow.

EVELYN. If I thought you'd be content with this one visit, but I see so well what's going to happen. You won't be satisfied with a countess. You'll want to stay with a duchess next. Then you won't rest till you know royalty, and by and by you'll begin to believe you are one of them.

PAUL. Don't talk so well, darling, or people will say you write my plays.

EVELYN. You won't write any more plays if you go on this way.

PAUL. A dramatist ought to know all kinds of people, and it's a very good thing for a young author to have a rich influential woman like Lady Epping interested in him.

EVELYN (*indignantly*). Paul!

PAUL. There's nothing in that.

EVELYN. You wouldn't like it if I got a rich influential man interested in me.

PAUL. That's different. (*LADY EPPING is seen through the window.*). Here's Lady Epping.

(*LADY EPPING enters. She is an elegant, dignified woman, with a gracious and grand manner and*

a very good opinion of herself. She is dressed in the latest and most expensive fashion.)

LADY EPPING. Ah, there you are! (To EVELYN.) I've been playing "consequences" with the Judge and Lady Beacroft and my little girls, and it turned out that I and your husband eloped, which set me wondering what had become of you. What are you doing in the house—you love birds?

PAUL. I've had a wretched woman from a paper to interview me.

LADY EPPING. We dramatists have to put up with so much of that. (PAUL and EVELYN look at LADY EPPING, then at each other. LADY EPPING looks from one to the other.) I write plays.

PAUL. Oh, do you?

EVELYN. How very interesting!

LADY EPPING. I am told I possess the dramatic instinct to a remarkable extent.

PAUL (politely). I'm sure of it.

LADY EPPING (very much pleased). I'm sure, too, if you say so.

PAUL. Have you produced many plays, Lady Epping?

LADY EPPING. Not many, but I nearly had one accepted once.

EVELYN. Have you written many?

LADY EPPING. Fifteen.

PAUL. Perhaps they are over the heads of the people.

LADY EPPING. No, they're not. I've written all kinds—tragedies, comedies, great productions, cheap productions, plays that give all the actors a chance and plays that give none of them a chance—except the star; strong plays, and sweet pretty little plays like your *Glass Houses*.

EVELYN (hardly able to conceal her indignation). Lady Epping! *Glass Houses* is a masterpiece.

PAUL. Evelyn, dear!

LADY EPPING. I don't know what the public want. I don't think they know themselves. And as for the managers—we all know *they* know nothing about it. The number of times I've had my plays returned.

EVELYN. Paul got a manager for *Glass Houses*.

LADY EPPING. It's so easy for him. He just gets some actress to take a fancy to him, and there you are.

PAUL. I never met my leading lady till the rehearsals.

LADY EPPING. But you can go behind the scenes and get to know these people. Now I can't go hanging about bars.

PAUL. We don't hang about bars.

LADY EPPING. It's so difficult for a woman. They are all against us. I never have any luck.

PAUL. That play which was nearly accepted. Perhaps you'll do something with *that*.

LADY EPPING. I was abominably treated. After keeping it two weeks they sent it back—and what do you think the objection was? They said I couldn't have three outdoor scenes in one act. Why not? Convention, I suppose—just one of those silly conventions that keep our stage so far behind the French. Of course I wasn't going to alter my play just to suit an actor, but in the end I did. We got as far as talking terms. But their *ideas*! I suppose they thought that as I don't need the money they could get my play for nothing. But I held out for what I thought was just. I don't think I've any right to go and spoil the market.

PAUL. Can't you do something else with your play?

LADY EPPING. I had five copies made and sent them to five different actresses. They are all reading it now—so they say. I couldn't wait for them to read it one after another. They take so long making up their minds.

PAUL. But suppose they all five accept it together?

LADY EPPING (*seriously*). Oh, they won't! (*Smiling at EVELYN*). I hope it doesn't bore you to hear your husband and me comparing notes.

EVELYN. Not at all.

LADY EPPING (*smiling at PAUL*). Would you like me to tell you the plot of my last play?

EVELYN. Please do.

LADY EPPING. Well: It's a husband and wife, and he neglects her for his business, so she flirts with another man. That's the first two acts. The third is the *great* act. She comes to his rooms late at night, and then her husband comes, so she goes behind a curtain. Don't you think that's a good plot for a play?

(*She smiles from one to the other.*)

PAUL. Excellent.

EVELYN. *Most original!*

PAUL. How do you end it?

LADY EPPING. She gets tired of the hollow insincerity of the world and goes to the hilltops to contemplate eternity. That's a very beautiful scene. I wonder if it's too much like Ibsen to suit the British public. (*Having made up her mind to alter the end of her play.*) Perhaps she'd better go to the colonies. I understand the colonials are more virtuous than we are. (*Smiling sweetly at PAUL.*) Why don't you and I collaborate on a play?

PAUL (*scarcely able to conceal his dismay*). Oh, no!

EVELYN (*trying to help PAUL out*). I'm sure you'd regret it, Lady Epping. My husband has *such* a temper.

LADY EPPING. Of course we should quarrel and fight. Collaborators always do. But what does that matter if we get our play on in the end?

PAUL. I'm sure I couldn't work with any one.

LADY EPPING. Yes, you could—

PAUL. Indeed, no!

LADY EPPING. We'll try it, anyway.

PAUL. Oh, but—

(Enter FOOTMEN with tea things which they put down. They then go out.)

LADY EPPING. We'll begin after tea. (LADY EPPING goes to the window while PAUL confers anxiously with EVELYN. LADY EPPING, calling into the garden.) Darlings—tea! (Exit LADY EPPING.)

(Enter MISS BERENGARIA MORTIMER. MISS MORTIMER is obviously an actress. She is statuesque and handsome, and generally affects a languid manner of speaking and moving. She wears a flowing garment and an Empire waist—a large picture hat with plumes flowing over the shoulders. Her hair is loosely done and caught before it tumbles by jewelled combs and daggers.)

EVELYN. Now you see what you've let yourself in for.

PAUL. Not before the servants, dear. Ah, here is Miss Berengaria Mortimer.

(EVELYN moves away.)

MISS MORTIMER. I've been resting under the trees ever since luncheon.

PAUL. Tired after your two performances yesterday ?

MISS MORTIMER. Oh, so, so tired. Let me go on telling you of my pet scheme. I want to have a little national theatre of my own, where I shall produce all the latest French and Sicilian horrors—to elevate the English stage.

EVELYN (*by the window*). I knew the Judge would hurry in at the sound of tea—with that little barrister yapping at his heels.

PAUL. Who ?

EVELYN. Mr. Clinton Perry.

(Enter JUDGE WRAY and CLINTON PERRY. WRAY is an elderly man of temperament, peevish and gay by turns and very gallant to ladies. He has a red, clean-shaven face. PERRY is a conceited, clever young barrister. He is engaging WRAY in conversation against his will as they enter. Enter also LORD OSWALD BRUCE-BANNERMAN.)

PERRY. But don't you think, my dear Judge, that in the interests of society—there ought to be a new court of criminal appeal—more liberal in its tendencies ?

WRAY. Young man, I never talk shop on a Sunday. Miss Mortimer—what a sad pity you couldn't come down till this morning.

(Exit PAUL.)

MISS MORTIMER. My work claimed me—my art.

WRAY. The party was dragging dreadfully till you came.

PERRY (*hovering about WRAY and MISS MORTIMER*). I always think an actress helps things along so.

MISS MORTIMER. I seldom go to country houses. I shouldn't be here now only I'm going to act in America soon, and it helps you so much in the States if they know you are in society. They'll all come to see me when they hear I've stayed at Epping House.

PERRY. Is your real name Berengaria ?

WRAY. Young man, Miss Mortimer is not one of your witnesses. (*To MISS MORTIMER.*) What a sweet name—Berengaria !

(He pats her hand.)

MISS MORTIMER. I don't care so much about the Beren—but I love the Garia. It sounds so remote—like sighing winds—Garia.

WRAY (*trying to make his voice sound like sighing winds*). Garia ! Shall we go there—by the window ?

MISS MORTIMER. I should love it.

WRAY (*as he goes to the window with MISS MORTIMER*). Garia !

(PERRY follows them.)

PERRY. Did I tell you my story about the magistrate and the washerwoman ?

WRAY. Young man, I am about to relate an anecdote myself.

PERRY (*to EVELYN and OSWALD*). Gay old bird ! (*Enter LADY LUCY LISTER and MISS VANDERHIDE from the garden. LUCY is a smart, pretty, frivolous little spinster. MISS VANDERHIDE is a large handsome American girl with a good figure, faultlessly dressed. She uses a lorgnette constantly, and cultivates a slow, supercilious manner, and speaks carefully to try and overcome her American accent. PERRY meets them.*) Well, girls !

LUCY (*sharply*). Don't call us girls. You don't know us nearly well enough.

PERRY (*importantly*). I've been talking to the actress.

MISS VANDERHIDE (*looking at EVELYN through her lorgnette*). That woman talking to Lord Oswald is something of that sort, isn't she ?

LUCY. No, that's Mrs. Hughes—the new dramatist's wife.

MISS VANDERHIDE. How odd your English society is ! One never knows whom one will meet next. We're much more exclusive in New York. Our old families won't mix at all with the nouveaux riches.

LUCY. I think it's rather a scandal the way Lord Oswald runs after Mrs. Hughes.

MISS VANDERHIDE. Does he ? I hadn't notussed.

(*She moves away and joins WRAY and MISS MORTIMER.*)

PERRY. I say, Lady Luey, you have put your foot in it.

LUCY. Why ? What have I said ?

PERRY. Lord Oswald is supposed to be after her,—the American—Miss Vanderhide. Of course when she came down she expected he'd be devoted to her.

LUCY. And he spends all his time talking to Mrs. Hughes. What fun !

PERRY. Lady Epping is furious about it.

LUCY. Why?

PERRY. Oswald Bruce-Bannerman is her brother, you know.

LUCY. Of course I know.

PERRY. Well, I suppose she wants to have the Vanderhides millions in the family.

LUCY. Oh, I see. Then Lady Epping and Miss Vanderhides are both in a rage. How amusing! I shall watch it all going on. I'm so glad I came.

(Re-enter LADY EPPING with LADY BEACROFT and PAUL following her.)

LADY EPPING (severely). Oswald. (Then sweetly.) Oswald, darling.

OSWALD (turning to LADY EPPING). What is it?

LADY EPPING. I want a word with you. (OSWALD goes to LADY EPPING. She slips her arm through his affectionately, then says severely.) You are jeopardising your whole future by flirting with Mrs. Hughes, after I've spent my valuable time and thought trying to throw you and Ollie Vanderhides together. Go and talk to Ollie and don't leave her till we've done tea.

OSWALD. You know, Flora—you do bully me.

(OSWALD goes to MISS VANDERHIDE. Enter LORD EPPING and REV. DR. GULL. They come in from the garden as DR. GULL speaks. LORD EPPING is a smart military-looking man about forty-five. He is politely bored by DR. GULL and all the party. DR. GULL is a middle-aged Scotch divine, dressed as a Nonconformist minister. He speaks with a coarse Scotch accent, emphasising his words with uncouth gesture.)

DR. GULL. The Sawbath is the Sawbath, my lord, whether ye be in Scotland or whether ye be in England. The Sawbath is the Sawbath.

LADY EPPING. Oh, look at my poor husband talking to that dreadful Dr. Gull. I thought I was so fortunate to secure the Caledonian Missionary for one of my parties, but he's such an awful bore.

LUCY. Oh, but he's so funny when he eats fish.

LADY EPPING (reproaching LUCY severely). Lucy dear, I don't think you should speak like that of one of my guests.

OSWALD. It's so like *you*, Flora, to ask a missionary to meet *us*.

MISS VANDERHIDE (*looking at DR. GULL through her lorgnette*). He wouldn't be received in New York.

LADY EPPING. Don't say that, Ollie. It sounds silly. You have very good hotels in New York, and you have your tall sky-scraper buildings, and your telephones are much better than ours. But that's all—you have nothing else. (*Calling.*) Dr. Gull! (*Turns to MISS MORTIMER.*) Berry!

(DR. GULL comes towards LADY EPPING.)

MISS MORTIMER (*coming towards LADY EPPING*). Darling one.

LADY EPPING. I want to introduce Dr. Gull, the famous Caledonian Missionary, Miss Berengaria Mortimer, the celebrated actress.

(DR. GULL and MISS MORTIMER shake hands.)

LUCY. Church and stage—how sweet!

LADY EPPING. Take him over there, Berry, and give him a scone. (*They move away.*) Come here, Mr. Perry. I want you to pass cups. (*PERRY comes to her.*) You too, Mr. Hughes. (*PAUL goes to the tea-table.*) All the young men.

WRAY. Of course, of course.

(WRAY hurries to the tea-table also.)

PERRY (*to WRAY*). Don't you think there was a serious miscarriage of justice in the Pimlico murder trial?

WRAY. Young man, I am about to have my tea. (*LADY EPPING gives a cup of tea to WRAY, who takes a piece of cake and his tea and goes to the sofa, where he sits between LADY BEACROFT and LUCY. WRAY, laughing and leering at them.*) A rose between two thorns. (*They all three laugh. PERRY brings two cups of tea to the sofa, giving one to LADY BEACROFT and the other to LUCY. He then goes back to the tea-table. WRAY fixes PERRY with a scowl while he hands the cups and until his neck will turn round no further. WRAY, laughing and leering as before.*) How happy could I be with either were t'other dear charmer away. (*They all three laugh as before. PERRY brings the sugar and cream, and the same irritation of WRAY takes place. PERRY returns to the table. WRAY, laughing and leering as before.*) Three's company, four's none. (*They all three laugh as before. PERRY brings the*

cake-stand. Again the annoyance of WRAY. WRAY, after he has gone.) I hope he won't come and sit on the sofa with us !

(LADY EPPING gives PERRY two cups of tea, and says, "Give this to Mrs. Hughes." PERRY moves to do so, and WRAY says, "Spread yourselves." PERRY goes to EVELYN, and giving her a cup, sits beside her.)

LADY EPPING (*calling to PAUL*). Come here, Mr. Hughes. The two dramatists must sit together. (PAUL comes and sits by her. *She then announces to the room*) Mr. Hughes and I are going to collaborate on a play.

MISS MORTIMER. Oh, will there be a part for me ?

LADY EPPING. Oh, yes. We must give Berry a part.

MISS MORTIMER. A pathetic little servant maid with smuts on her face. That's the kind of part I've always longed to play, but they *will* make me be queens.

WRAY. What's the play going to be about, Lady Epping ?

LADY EPPING (*seriously*). We are going to scourge society.

LUCY (*simpering*). Oh, how amusing ! I shall *love* that.

LADY EPPING. You won't find it at all amusing, Luey. It's to be a serious attack on the smart set.

WRAY. Which vice are you going for ? Same old thing ? Bridge ?

LADY EPPING. That's not been decided. It's easy enough to get a vice. I think there are several things about us which might be improved.

DR. GULL (*earnestly*). Amen !

LUCY. *Did* you hear Dr. Gull say "Amen" ? How sweet !

WRAY (*to LADY BEACROFT and LUCY*). Shall we three go and play the pianola ?

LADY EPPING. You can't have the music room ; Dr. Gull is going to sing hymns there with the servants after tea.

LUCY. Oh, how *darling* ! Hymns on Sunday afternoon—so original !

LADY EPPING (*graciously to DR. GULL*). I shall try to come in for a verse or two, Dr. Gull.

WRAY. We'll all come. Won't you come and sing hymns, Miss Vanderhide ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. No, thanks. I prefer croquet.

LADY EPPING (*to PAUL*). While they are at their hymns you and I will begin our play.

PAUL (*embarrassed*). Oh, but——

LADY EPPING (*cheerfully*). Yes, yes. I feel just in the mood for it.

DR. GULL. Your leddyship wouldna' write a drama on the Sawbath ?

LADY EPPING. Why not ? I must express myself when I feel in the humour, like the Judge in his legal work or you in your religious work. It's all the same.

DR. GULL (*bringing his fist heavily down on the tea tray and shouting*). The kirk is no the same as the theayter.

(*They all raise their eyebrows and look towards DR. GULL in well-bred surprise. There is silence.*)

LADY EPPING (*very politely to DR. GULL*). Dr. Gull, the servants will be waiting for you. You know whieh the music room is, do you not ?

DR. GULL. I thought I were in England, but I see that I'm e'en in the city of Babylon.

(*Exit DR. GULL.*)

WRAY (*springing up indignantly*). Bedlam ! Did he call us Bedlam ?

LADY EPPING. Babylon.

WRAY. Oh ! Beebecause if he'd said Bedlam I should have retaliated. I don't know what I should have said, but I should have said something.

LADY EPPING (*to MISS MORTIMER, who is following DR. GULL*). You needn't go and sing hymns, Berry.

MISS MORTIMER. Dearest one, I should like to. I want to study the servants' expressions.

(*Exit MISS MORTIMER.*)

PERRY (*offering his case*). Have a eigarette, Judge ?

WRAY. Young man, I never smoke.

(*He moves away from PERRY.*)

LADY BEACROFT. Mr. Hughes, Mr. Hughes, do come and talk to us. (*PAUL takes WRAY's place between them.*) Tell us all about first nights.

LUCY. Do you come before the curtain and make a bow ?

PAUL. That depends upon the audiencee.

LADY BEACROFT. I write plays.

PAUL. Do you ?

(*He snatches LADY BEACROFT'S cup, puts it on the table and is about to escape, when LADY EPPING speaks.*)

LADY EPPING. Don't run away, Mr. Hughes. (Enter two FOOTMEN to clear away the tea-things.) We are going to begin the play now. (To JOHN.) John, will you ask Mrs. Pitt to send me my box of plays—the large black tin box?

JOHN. Yes, my lady.

(*Exit JOHN and the other footman.*)

LORD EPPING. Going to write plays? Then you won't need me any more!

(*Exit LORD EPPING into the garden.*)

LADY BEACROFT (*to WRAY*). Judge, Judge, are you ready to take me for a walk?

WRAY. With pleasure, Lady Beacroft. We might take Lord Epping with us. I think some one should take a little notice of our poor host.

(*Exeunt WRAY and LADY BEACROFT through the window.*)

PAUL (*to EVELYN*). Will you come for a walk with me?

EVELYN. But *you* are going to collaborate with Lady Epping.

PAUL. No. Let us go for a walk.

LADY EPPING. Oswald darling, take Miss Vanderhide for a stroll.

OSWALD. I'm going for a walk with Mrs. Hughes.

(*Exeunt EVELYN and OSWALD.*)

MISS VANDERHIDE. I hadn't the slightest desire to go for a walk.

LADY EPPING (*in a whisper to MISS VANDERHIDE*). He's only flirting with Mrs. Hughes to make you jealous.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I presume so.

LADY EPPING. You mustn't mind.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I'm amused. Mr. Perry, would you like to play me at croquet?

PERRY. I haven't got my croquet suit on, but if you don't mind my playing with you like this.

MISS VANDERHIDE. Oh, you look perfectly sweet as you are.

(*Exeunt MISS VANDERHIDE and PERRY.*)

LUCY. Oh, I'm forgetting all about the hymns. (*Putting down a magazine she has been reading.*) Do

look in at us, Flora. Dr. Gull is *sure* to beat time with his arms and legs. So sweet !

(*Exit LUCY, R.*)

LADY EPPING. What a pity Lucy is so silly. I think she's getting worse. (*Enter JOHN with the box of plays, which he puts on the floor and then exits.*) Put it down there on the floor. Now we can get on with our play.

PAUL (*in distress*). I don't think I *can* work to-day, Lady Epping.

LADY EPPING (*cheerfully*). Oh, yes, you can, if you give your mind to it.

PAUL. I haven't an idea in my head.

LADY EPPING. Neither have I; but that's the advantage of collaboration. We stimulate each other. Now, let us see if there isn't something here that we could work up. (*She kneels behind the box, opens it and begins burrowing among the manuscripts. On the lid of the box a large Countess' coronet is painted in white.* PAUL *sits watching her.* LADY EPPING *reads the titles of some of her plays as she picks them out of the box and puts them back again.*) "The Insubordination of Laura," "The Tower of Babel," "Little Tummy-Sit-in-the-Pan"—that's a play for children—"Two Sins and a Woman." (*Retaining "Two Sins and a Woman."*) This is my last play—the one I told you the plot of. It's full of bright lines. Listen to this. It's the Duke of Vere's first meeting with Lady Dorineourt. The Duke aside—(*reading.*) "By gad, as fine a woman as ever I set eyes on." (*To PAUL.*) There's quite a masculine touch about my work, isn't there? (*Reading.*) Lady Dorineourt aside—"I feel some strange misgiving clutching at my heart-strings. If this fascinating and mysterious man has been sent to lure me away from the straight path which the world has hewn for us poor women to walk in, I fear he may be successful." (*Smiling at PAUL.*) That's the way I prepare for the dénouement. (*Reading.*) "If one will not venture, one is not likely to have." (*To PAUL.*) That's an epigram. (*PAUL nods his head.* *Reading.*) Lady Dorineourt—"Ah me!" The Duke of Vere, who lives half the year in Rome—"Amico mio!" (*To PAUL.*) A play upon words, you see.

PAUL. Oh !

LADY EPPING. I hope it is not too subtle for the British public. They can't understand anything unless you give it them straight from the shoulder. We'd better not give them this play till we've educated them up to it. (*Throwing "Two Sins and a Woman" into the box and taking out another. She reads the title.*)

“The Penalty of Passion.” That's so strong. I'll read you an extract from the last act. (*The “Penalty of Passion” is a serious poetic play, so LADY EPPING reads it with reverence, but also with dramatic emphasis, clearly portraying the merciless tyrant in Norheld's part and the hapless queen in Vaneshla's. She reads the stage directions reverently.*) “Queen Vaneshla is lying on a bed of straw in the dungeon. It is midnight. Clock strikes ten. Nuns are heard singing Mass in the distance. Enter King Norheld.

“‘Is that the Queen who lies so very still ?
Is that Vaneshla, once my bride so fair ?
Dost thou not hear me ? 'Tis King Norheld speaks.
Hast lost thy tongue—you saucy baggage you ?’

(*Reading stage direction.*) Drags Vaneshla round dungeon by hair of head.” (*Explaining to PAUL.*) Of course she'll have to wear a wig. (*Continuing the reading of Vaneshla's part.*)

“‘Oh, spare me, sire ! Oh, spare thy hapless queen !
Vaneshla weeps. Vaneshla loves her lord :
Can innocence and beauty wed with sin ?’”

(*LADY EPPING becomes so moved by the pathos of the scene that tears choke her utterance.*) That's so touching, isn't it ? (*PAUL laughs stupidly. Her eyes fall on a farce called “Clapham Flats.” She screams with laughter, throws “The Penalty of Passion” into the box, and takes out “Clapham Flats,” screaming with laughter as she says.*) Oh, “Clapham Flats” ! Such a funny farce ! I must read you one passage. They push the cook into the boiler, and the cook says—— (*She breaks into fresh peals of laughter, then calms herself enough to say.*) The cook says—— (*Fresh peals of laughter. She gives the manuscript to PAUL, showing him the place to read, then staggers towards the window in fits of uncontrollable laughter. PAUL reads the manuscript without smiling.*

When LADY EPPING has recovered her composure she wipes her eyes and comes back to him, speaking in the husky voice one is left with after such laughter.) Oh, dear, I'd forgotten "Clapham Flats" was so fun-ny. (*She watches PAUL reading the manuscript before she says.*) You are not laughing at all, and I thought you had such a sense of humour.

PAUL. Let me put them away.

(*He gets the box and puts it upon a chair.*)

LADY EPPING. Now! You've seen several examples of my work. I want your candid opinion.

PAUL (*embarrassed*). It's full of clever things.

LADY EPPING (*smiling*). I thought you'd like it.

PAUL. But I should say—on the whole—it is scarcely up to the necessary standard.

LADY EPPING. Oh, I don't agree with you. Look at the stuff they put on the stage.

PAUL (*turning over "Clapham Flats"*). You see the play is so short.

LADY EPPING. That's an advantage. Every one will come in time if we begin late enough.

PAUL. And then again—

LADY EPPING (*taking the manuscript from PAUL and hugging it*). I'm sorry you don't like my work. (*Turning the pages.*) I did think you'd be able to see something in it, but you do nothing but pick it to pieces.

PAUL. It seems to me you are wasting yourself on literature. You have so many brilliant gifts.

LADY EPPING (*very pleased, she turns to PAUL, smiling*). Tell me what you think my best points are.

PAUL (*embarrassed*). I hardly like to.

LADY EPPING. Oh, why? Friends should always be candid.

PAUL (*smiling at her*). Friends!

(*He leans towards LADY EPPING and puts his hand near hers.*)

LADY EPPING (*withdrawing her hand*). You mustn't get silly about me. Now! What shall our play be about?

PAUL (*with the husky voice of pretended passion*). I can't think of work when I'm near you.

(*He folds his arms and looks at LADY EPPING through half-closed eyes.*)

LADY EPPING (*sentimentally*). I'm sorry. I hoped we should be able to work sensibly together.

PAUL (*ardently*). I can't work sensibly with *you*. (*He seizes LADY EPPING in his arms.*)

(Enter EVELYN quickly from the garden. She hurries forward.)

LADY EPPING (*escaping from PAUL's embrace*). Mr. Hughes, you forget where you are.

EVELYN (*in horror*). Paul !

LADY EPPING. Oh ! (*Speaking and gesticulating in an intensely melodramatic fashion*). Lost ! Lost ! A lost woman for evermore. (*Turns to EVELYN, smiling pleasantly.*) We are rehearsing our play.

(She strolls into the garden.)

EVELYN (*to PAUL*). Show me the manuscript. (*PAUL picks up the manuscript of "Clapham Flats."*) Show me the place where it says "Lost, lost, a lost woman for evermore." (*PAUL turns the pages in agitation*). There isn't such a line, is there ?

PAUL. There may be. I shouldn't be at all surprised.

EVELYN (*reproachfully*). Oh, Paul ! I didn't think you'd do that.

PAUL. Evelyn, let me explain.

EVELYN. You had her in your arms.

PAUL. In a way.

EVELYN. You were making love to her.

PAUL. In a way.

EVELYN. Well—how are you going to explain that ?

PAUL. This way : she would try and collaborate with me, so—to keep her mind off it—I began to make love to her. It was the only thing to do.

EVELYN (*with decision*). We must leave this house at once.

PAUL. Oh, my dear. That's impossible.

EVELYN. I'm going, if you aren't.

PAUL. There's nothing in it. She's a little flattered. That's all. You don't think I'm *really* in love with her !

EVELYN. That's not the point. The point is this : I've been out for a walk with Lord Oswald Bruce-Bannerman, and he kissed me.

PAUL. The brute ! I'll wring his neck.

(LADY EPPING appears again at the window.)

EVELYN. Shall we leave at once ?

PAUL. Yes. You shan't stay here another minute. Lady Epping ! (LADY EPPING steps into the room. *She is very dignified and gracious.*) My wife and I are so very sorry, but we must say good-bye.

LADY EPPING (*raising her eyebrows slightly*). Oh !

EVELYN. At once.

PAUL. We thank you very much for asking us here.

EVELYN. Good-bye.

PAUL (*offering his hand*). Good-bye.

LADY EPPING. This is rather sudden. You have not told me why you must go.

PAUL (*embarrassed*). I—I think I'd better not.

LADY EPPING. Oh—but don't you think you should ?

EVELYN. We can't.

LADY EPPING. But I shall be afraid that we have unintentionally offended you. I think it would be kinder if you explained your hurried departure.

(PAUL *hesitates and looks at EVELYN*.)

EVELYN. You explain while I pack. (*She goes out.*)

LADY EPPING. Did your wife observe your indiscretion ?

PAUL. Yes.

LADY EPPING. And believe *my* explanation ?

PAUL. No !

LADY EPPING. That is the reason you are—running away ?

PAUL. One of the reasons.

LADY EPPING. It doesn't seem to have entered your head to consider me.

PAUL. You ?

LADY EPPING. She'll go and tell everybody why she left the house : Because she found her husband making love to Lady Epping. Don't you see—don't you see what a position you have placed me in ?

PAUL. I'm very sorry.

LADY EPPING. Sorry ! That won't do at all.

PAUL. Is Lord Epping a jealous man ? (LADY EPPING *raises her eyebrows and stares at PAUL, until he becomes ashamed of having asked the question*). I beg your pardon ! I wonder what we had better do ?

LADY EPPING. I don't. I know. You will have the goodness to go to your wife and to tell her that you have committed a very great breach of propriety. You will say that you lost your head—or whatever you like—and

that I was very much surprised. You will tell her that you apologised to me, and that I have so far overlooked your behaviour as to ask you to continue your visit until to-morrow morning, when it terminates naturally. And you will forbid her to say anything about what she saw—if you please.

(Enter EVELYN.)

EVELYN. Aren't you coming, Paul?

LADY EPPING (*smiling*). Now I must go and look after my other guests.

(She goes up leisurely and strolls off into the garden.)

EVELYN. Are you ready?

PAUL (*thoughtfully*). Evelyn—if we go at once—it'll look so funny. I was only *pretending* to make love to Lady Epping, and of course she was quite above lending herself to anything of the sort.

EVELYN (*maliciously*). Yes, I saw she didn't like it.

PAUL. She has treated the matter as a woman of the world would, told me not to be so silly, and asked us to stay on.

EVELYN. What about Lord Oswald kissing *me*?

PAUL. Let it be a lesson to you. Don't let your unsophistication lead you into any such mistake again.

EVELYN. My mistake was telling you. That's where my unsophistication came in.

PAUL (*shocked*). Evelyn! You surprise me!

EVELYN. You can't have everything, Paul. You can consider Lady Epping first or you can consider me first—whichever you like.

PAUL. I think we must stay.

EVELYN (*airily*). Very well; and if that wicked attractive Lord Oswald begins any more of his nonsense—

PAUL (*losing his temper*). Evelyn!

EVELYN (*airily*). I shall know what to do.

PAUL. You are only doing this to exasperate me, but I'm not the least exasperated, and I wish you wouldn't do it.

(He looks very glum.)

EVELYN (*flippantly to cover her annoyance*). Seriously, Paul, I think you are mighty sensible to stay on. We should look so very unsophisticated if we ran away. Of course it will be embarrassing for you after making such an unspeakable faux pas—making love to Lady Epping

in front of all those windows. Oh, Paul—you really must learn better. We went behind a shed.

PAUL (*indignantly*). Stop it!

(LADY EPPING and OSWALD are seen coming up the garden.)

EVELYN. There's Lady Epping with Lord Oswald. She has forgiven you—well—I must forgive him.

(LADY EPPING enters the room. OSWALD remains at the window.)

LADY EPPING. I've just been through three of the croquet hoops and had a hymn with Dr. Gull, and here I am.

EVELYN. I will leave you to talk to my husband, Lady Epping. Will you walk with me to the lake, Lord Oswald?

OSWALD. Certainly; haven't you seen the lake?

EVELYN (*kissing her finger tips to PAUL*). Bye bye, Paul. (Exeunt EVELYN and OSWALD.)

LADY EPPING. Well—is it all right now? Are you staying?

PAUL. Yes, thank you, Lady Epping—until tomorrow.

LADY EPPING (*graciously*). And now—remember what I told you—don't get silly about me.

PAUL. No, Lady Epping.

LADY EPPING. Not too silly.

PAUL (*giving one gasp of surprise before he says*). I—I apologise.

LADY EPPING. I ought to be angry with you, but—(*offering her hand to PAUL*) let us be friends.

PAUL (*grasping it*). Thank you.

LADY EPPING (*looking down at their clasped hands, says coquettishly*). You are hurting my hand.

PAUL (*embarrassed*). I beg your pardon.

(He releases her hand.)

LADY EPPING (*watching him, smiling, then saying gravely*). I don't want you to feel I'm displeased with you. (She again holds out her hand.) Friends?

PAUL (*taking her hand, smiling, as he says*). Friends.

LADY EPPING (*looking down at their clasped hands*). Yes. That's better. (*Sentimentally*.) I wonder whether a man and a woman really can be—friends?

PAUL. Why not?

LADY EPPING. After a man has spoken to a woman as you have spoken to me?

PAUL (*troubled*). Please forget my indiscretion, Lady Epping.

(*He attempts to move away, but she draws him back.*)

LADY EPPING. That's it. She can't quite forget. The situation isn't quite the same. But I hope we shall be friends, or—(*smiling coquettishly at him*) just a little more?

PAUL (*embarrassed*). Oh—yes.

LADY EPPING. A very little more. (*She drops PAUL's hand and glances at the windows.*) We mustn't be too long alone together. (*She goes to the window, then turns to say to him.*) A little more than friends.

(*She nods and smiles at PAUL, then goes out. PAUL stands gaping.*)

PAUL. Oh, lor! (He sinks down on a chair.)

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE.—*The library of the Eppings' house in Berkeley Square. The furniture and hangings are handsome and sombre.*

It is in the middle of the afternoon of a day at the end of September, a few weeks later than the first act.

LORD EPPING is lying on the sofa fast asleep. Enter HENRY, a footman. HENRY is followed by LADY LUCY LISTER and MISS VANDERHIDE. LORD EPPING wakes with a start, rubs his eyes and rises. HENRY goes out.

LUCY. Epping ! I do believe you were fast asleep.

(LORD EPPING shakes hands with LUCY, then with
MISS VANDERHIDE.)

LORD EPPING. I was. I travelled from Scotland last night with my wife. How are you ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. Well, thank you.

LUCY. Flora said you would be home to-day, and on my way here I met Miss Vanderhide shopping in Bond Street—so I made her come with me.

LORD EPPING. I'm sorry this is the only room that's fit to sit in, but half the house is shut up still. We are not supposed to be in London yet.

LUCY. We don't mind.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I suppose you had a perfectly lovely time in Scotland.

LORD EPPING. It was all right. We've been staying at Cookie Castle with the Duke—my wife's father. My wife got up some theatricals. She had that man—what's his name—the one who wrote "Glass Houses," to help her.

LUCY. Mr. Hughes.

LORD EPPING. Yes—nice fellow—do you know him ?

LUCY. Of *course*. I met him at Epping House, just before we all left London.

LORD EPPING. Oh, did you ? I can't remember half the people we have there. Such conglomerations as Flora gathers about her every Saturday to Monday !

MISS VANDERHIDE (*pointedly*). Was *Mrs.* Hughes in Scotland too ?

LORD EPPING (*carelessly*). No—he came without her. (Yawns.)

LUCY (*to MISS VANDERHIDE behind LORD EPPING'S back*). What did I tell you ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. It's a scandal.

LORD EPPING (*having recovered from his yawn, and turning to them*). I beg your pardon. I didn't have a wink of sleep all night.

MISS VANDERHIDE. You *look* exhausted.

LORD EPPING. Simply dead beat.

LUCY. I can sleep beautifully in the train.

LORD EPPING. So can I. But about midnight Flora thought of a plot for a play—something about a foreign princess who wants to marry an Englishman but for state reasons she can't. They all had red hair and lived in a made-up place called Puritania. So tiresome when you want to go to sleep.

LUCY. Poor Epping—and poor Flora. She must be more exhausted still.

(Enter LADY EPPING, *gaily and vigorously*. She is in her outdoor clothes.)

LADY EPPING. Well, dears, have you been waiting for me a very long time ? I've had such a busy afternoon. How are you, Ollie ? (Kissing her.) Handsomer than ever. I've been to Peckham— (Kissing LUCY.) Well, Lucy darling. What a sweetly pretty hat !—to open some baths. A most interesting ceremony. I made a speech. (To LORD EPPING.) You ought to have been there to hear the compliments the Mayor paid me. (LORD EPPING, his eyes closed, nods his head and moans. She addresses the others.) Has he been telling you what a splendid time we had in Scotland ? All the children fell ill together and I nursed them. We shot all day and played no end of hockey, and had the most amusing rehearsals for our theatricals. I played the leading part.

MISS VANDERHIDE. Did Mr. Hughes play the lover ?

LADY EPPING. Oh, I see. Epping has told you all about it. (*She sits at a desk. LUCY and MISS VANDERHIDE nod their heads knowingly to each other.*) I must write a few letters, but I can talk at the same time.

(*She writes very fast. LORD EPPING, his eyes still closed, stumbles in his sleep. LUCY looks at him.*)

LUCY. Did you see him going to sleep standing up ? How sweet !

LORD EPPING. I really think I must go and lie down.

LADY EPPING. Poor old thing ! (*Exit LORD EPPING. As she writes.*) Gossip away, darlings. Tell me all the news.

MISS VANDERHIDE (*solemnly*). I'm going back to Amurica to-morrer.

LADY EPPING. Tired of us, Ollie ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. I don't object to England—though of course it's not Parus—but I've practically made up my mind to marry an Amurican.

LADY EPPING (*stops writing and says in dismay*). Oh ! (*Graciously.*) I hope you will be very happy.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I've not settled on him yet.

LADY EPPING. Ah !

LUCY. But you've made up your mind to go back ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. I shall come over sometimes for Ascot, or Cowes.

LUCY. With your American husband ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. We generally leave them behind.

(*LADY EPPING rises.*)

LUCY. May I write a letter ?

LADY EPPING. Of course.

LUCY (*taking LADY EPPING'S place*). Thank you so much. I forgot all about it before I came, and it's so important.

LADY EPPING. Oh, Lucy, I'm sure you could never have anything important to write.

LUCY. Oh, Flora !

LADY EPPING. Come over here, Ollie, so that we shan't disturb Lucy. (*LUCY writes her letter and MISS VANDERHIDE joins LADY EPPING the other side of the room.*) What makes you want to go back to America ?

MISS VANDERHIDE. Patriotism.

LADY EPPING. How can you feel patriotic about a great big country like that? Who's the man?

MISS VANDERHIDE. What man?

LADY EPPING. Do you know, dear, I once had an idea you cared for my brother.

MISS VANDERHIDE. Lord Oswald?

LADY EPPING. He's devoted to *you*.

MISS VANDERHIDE. His may be the English way of showing it. It certainly isn't the American. It's bad enough to have your *husband* flirting with a married woman, or your *fiancé*, but to have a man going on like that before he's even engaged to you! English girls put up with anything, but *we* don't.

LADY EPPING. I admit Oswald did wrong to flirt with Mrs. Hughes—but forgive the past.

MISS VANDERHIDE. It's his present I'm so mad about.

LADY EPPING. The present soon becomes the past.

MISS VANDERHIDE. If you know a man's past you can bet on his future.

LADY EPPING. His future takes a turn on his wedding day. Oswald would make a splendid husband. He has neither brain nor will, and he can be *so* attentive to a woman. You saw that.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I've taken my passage now. And if I'm to sail tomorrow, I must hurry back to superintend my packing.

LADY EPPING. See Oswald when he calls.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I've no expectation of such a call.

LADY EPPING. He shall call at six o'clock.

(MISS VANDERHIDE *going to LUCY, shakes hands with her.*)

MISS VANDERHIDE. Au revoir. (LUCY *replies.* MISS VANDERHIDE *returns to LADY EPPING.*) Au revoir.

LADY EPPING. Six o'clock.

MISS VANDERHIDE. I shan't be there at six. Make it six-fifteen.

(*Exit MISS VANDERHIDE.*)

LADY EPPING. We mustn't let her go back to America. She's far too rich—far too nice. (Enter OSWALD.) Oswald!

OSWALD. Hullo, Flora!

LADY EPPING. I didn't know *you* were in the house.

OSWALD (*shaking hands with LUCY*). How are you,

Luey? (To LADY EPPING.) I've been looking for Epping.

LADY EPPING. He's resting after his journey,—poor old thing. Stay and talk to me.

OSWALD. All right.

LADY EPPING (*to LUCY, tactfully*). Now, Lucy darling, I mustn't keep you here any longer. I know you have no end of things to do.

LUCY (*getting up and going*). Very well, I'll go, but—
(*She glances at OSWALD, then whispers to LADY EPPING.*) Do tell me how it turns out. I heard all you said to Miss Vanderhide.

(*Exit LUCY.*)

LADY EPPING (*LADY EPPING sits on a sofa and puts her feet up, then turns to OSWALD*). I must take my rest while I'm talking to you. Ollie Vanderhide is at Claridge's, and she's going back to America to-morrow unless you stop her.

OSWALD. Then I suppose she'll go.

LADY EPPING. Don't let her. You'll never get another chancée like Ollie—beautiful and rich, and ready to put up with you.

OSWALD. Did you say Claridge's?

LADY EPPING. I think you might possibly catch her there about six-fifteen.

OSWALD. All right.

LADY EPPING. But mind, Oswald—if you *do* become engaged to Ollie Vanderhide—no more flirting with Mrs. Hughes.

OSWALD. We're not flirting now. We're good friends. I'm sorry for the little woman.

LADY EPPING. Sorry for her? Why?

OSWALD. You know why.

LADY EPPING. Don't be impertinent.

OSWALD. Look here, Flora, I may as well tell you. People are beginning to gossip about you and—you know.

LADY EPPING. I don't know who you mean, but surely a woman in my position may take an interest in a rising author without—

OSWALD. It's chiefly because you had him to stay when you went home.

LADY EPPING. As one of a large party.

OSWALD. Without his wife.

LADY EPPING. What a very middle-class objection !

OSWALD. Well—I've warned you, and I advise you not to have him here too much.

LADY EPPING. It is most unlikely that he will come here at all.

(Enter HENRY.)

HENRY. Is your ladyship at home to Mr. Paul Hughes ?

LADY EPPING. Oh ! (A pause.) Yes.

(Exit HENRY. OSWALD laughs. LADY EPPING stares at him.)

OSWALD (laughing). I can't help it, Flora, it's so funny ! I'm off to Claridge's—I hope you'll enjoy yourself.

(Exit OSWALD. Enter HENRY showing in PAUL.)

PAUL. I got your note asking me to come.

LADY EPPING. Sh ! (To HENRY.) Henry—if any one calls, I am not at home.

HENRY. Thank you, my lady.

LADY EPPING. Don't forget.

HENRY. No, my lady.

(Exit HENRY.)

LADY EPPING. He's new. How glum you look.

PAUL (sighing). No wonder.

LADY EPPING (archly). Just because he hasn't seen me for two whole days ?

PAUL. Partly that.

LADY EPPING (pretending to be offended). Partly ?

PAUL. Mostly, but—I don't know what to do about it.

LADY EPPING. What's the matter ?

PAUL. Everything. Lady Epping—

LADY EPPING. I told you you might call me Flora when we are by ourselves.

PAUL. Flora—I'm an ape !

LADY EPPING. Oh, you funny boy. You must put that in one of your plays.

PAUL (earnestly). Yes. I am an *ape*, but it's not funny—not for *me*. Ever since I came back from Scotland my wife won't speak to me.

LADY EPPING (seriously concerned, says quickly). Oh—oh—now I'm not going to have a scandal.

PAUL. She's taken all my photographs out of their

frames and got one of your brother perched on her desk—where *I* used to be. It's disgraceful the way those two are carrying on. They've been to Earl's Court together.

LADY EPPING (*busy with her own thoughts*). But didn't you explain to your wife that you simply came to Scotland to assist me with my theatricals?

PAUL. I thought I was a guest.

LADY EPPING. Of course you were—don't be so silly. But she ought to understand that with two dramatists it's different. We've got an excuse.

PAUL. Look here, Flora—

LADY EPPING. Don't raise your voice. I hear that people are talking about us.

PAUL. Then we must see less of each other.

LADY EPPING. Or be more careful.

PAUL. There's bound to be talk if we keep on.

LADY EPPING. Nothing to what there will be if we suddenly leave off.

PAUL (*advancing to her*). I am going to be one of two things—I'll either be a good husband—

LADY EPPING. I don't think it's in very good taste of you to say that to me.

PAUL. I'll either be a good husband or else I'll be a gay Lothario,—a danger—a menace to your domestic happiness. I must see Lord Epping livid with jealousy and the Duke running down from Cookie Castle to implore you to give me up. As I pass up Piceadilly I must see men-about-town nudging each other at club windows, as much as to say, "That's *him*. That's the young devil Lady Epping's breaking her heart about." I'll have that or a well-ordered home. It's for you to choose, but I'm going to be something definite.

LADY EPPING (*with emotion. Going to PAUL and laying her hand on his arm*). If we could let ourselves go—but it wouldn't be right. (*PAUL attempts to kiss LADY EPPING. She steps back hastily.*) Prenez garde!

PAUL (*angrily*). There—you see! You don't want to kiss *me*. You want *me* to want to kiss *you*, and you'll not let me. I've had enough of this one-sided game, so there's nothing else for it but for me to go home and be a good husband.

(*He is going to the door.*)

LADY EPPING (*following*). Ah, no, no—not that! I mean—don't go away in anger.

PAUL (*coming back to her*). Flora, I'm convineed you don't care a rap for me. Any fool would do as well to dancee attendancee.

LADY EPPING. Oh, cruel—eruel! Perhaps I *am* too well regulated, but then—I'm such a busy woman—I haven't time to go searching my heart all day. It takes a thoroughly *idle* woman to be sentimental. But, oh, Paul! (*She begins to cry*.) Now I'm making myself cry—and suppose any one came in. How dreadful that would be. Wait here while I run up to my room and dab something on. Then we'll have a nice cosy chat like we used to do in Scotland.

(*Exit LADY EPPING. PAUL marches over to the fireplace moodily. Enter HENRY.*)

HENRY. Mrs. Paul Hughes.

(*Exit HENRY. Enter EVELYN. They stare at each other embarrassed, and surprised, before they speak.*)

EVELYN (*as if they were the merest acquaintances*). How d'you do, Paul?

PAUL. Evelyn! (*Trying to appear at ease*.) Have you come to call on Lady Epping?

EVELYN. Yes. And you?

PAUL. Yes; after staying there, you know. I thought it better to call. (*A silence.*)

EVELYN. Yes. What an ideal September day it is.

PAUL. Is it?

EVELYN. Yes. It's beginning to rain.

PAUL. I'll have a look.

(*PAUL goes to the window. As he moves he surreptitiously returns the chair he sat in near LADY EPPING to its original placee.*)

EVELYN. I should leave the furniture as it is if you want to look as if nothing had happened.

PAUL (*indignantly*). We never sat in those chairs.

EVELYN. Of course not. There's a sofa.

PAUL (*with dignity*). I think you forget what Lady Epping's position is.

EVELYN. I don't know what it *is*, but I suppose it *was* on the sofa.

PAUL. Evelyn—what have you come here for?

EVELYN. To see Lady Epping.

PAUL. To—to have it out with her?

EVELYN. Have what out, Paul?

PAUL. I don't know, but there's a gleam in your eye that I don't like. I hope you are going to be polite to Lady Epping.

EVELYN. That was my intention—till I found you here. Now—now—I don't know that I can answer for myself.

PAUL. You're not going to fight about me?

EVELYN. That depends on Lady Epping.

PAUL. But think what a ridiculous figure *I* should cut standing here between you.

EVELYN. Then you'd better go.

PAUL. I shan't budge.

LADY EPPING (*heard outside*). Are you there?

EVELYN (*calling back*). Yes, I'm here.

(PAUL looks about him in alarm; then, feeling unequal to the situation, darts out of the room. Enter LADY EPPING. She is surprised to find EVELYN where she left PAUL, but her composure is perfect. She advances graciously to EVELYN and shakes hands.)

LADY EPPING. How kind of you to come and see me the first day I am in London. Do sit down.

(EVELYN sits.)

EVELYN (*seriously*). You take a great interest in my husband, don't you, Lady Epping?

LADY EPPING (*graciously*). I think his work is charming.

EVELYN. Before Paul became famous and had his head turned we were like two sweethearts.

LADY EPPING. Indeed.

EVELYN (*resentfully*). Don't you think it's a great shame for a married woman to come between two sweethearts?

LADY EPPING (*seriously*). Yes, I do. I have wished to speak to you on this matter for some time, but I felt delicate about it. However—since you have introduced the subject—Mrs. Hughes, let me counsel you—as an elder woman may a younger—leave well alone.

EVELYN (*surprised*). My husband?

LADY EPPING. My brother.

EVELYN. Oh !

LADY EPPING. Your conscience pricks you, so you have come to tell me.

EVELYN. No.

LADY EPPING. Don't try to check your better feelings. You are sorry—because, as you said just now, you have come between two sweethearts.

EVELYN. It's *you*.

LADY EPPING. Don't be rude, please. See, I am not angry with you. I daresay you meant no harm.

EVELYN (*clenching her fists in inarticulate rage*). Oh ! Oh, oh !

LADY EPPING (*going to her*). There, there. Have a good cry. It will do you good.

EVELYN. We are not talking about *me and Lord Oswald* and Miss Vanderhide. We are talking about *you and me and Paul* !

LADY EPPING. I suppose you think it very clever of you to turn it off in this way.

EVELYN. *I'm not turning it off—you are !*

LADY EPPING. I begin to fear your guilt is greater than I had supposed.

EVELYN. Oh !

LADY EPPING. Or you wouldn't lose your self-control in this way. Try and tell me all about it quietly, and we'll see if we can't get you out of the scrape without letting your husband know.

EVELYN. Oh, you are a wicked woman. You know quite well I'm in the right and you are in the wrong—but you're so sharp—

LADY EPPING. This is impossible.

(*She rings the bell.*)

EVELYN. Call the servants,—turn me out, but I'll get even with you yet—you hard-hearted husband stealer.

(*Exit EVELYN.*)

LADY EPPING. Insolence !

(*Enter HENRY.*)

HENRY. If you please, my lady, are you at home to Miss Berengaria Mortimer ?

LADY EPPING. Henry, why, when I distinctly told you I was not at home to any one, did you admit Mrs. Hughes ?

HENRY. Well, you see, my lady, she bore the same name as the gentleman who was with you, so I thought she must be his wife.

LADY EPPING. Well?

HENRY. I knew if she was his wife it was all right to let her in.

LADY EPPING. Really, Henry, you are a very stupid boy. Tell Mr. Buck to give you notice at once.

HENRY (*respectfully*). Thank you, my lady.

LADY EPPING (*screams out*). Berry!

(Enter MISS MORTIMER. Exit HENRY.)

MISS MORTIMER. Darling one, I heard of your return, so I rushed in to tell you the news.

LADY EPPING. Yes, dear, but I want your advice first. *You* are an actress. *You* ought to know all about the emotions.

MISS MORTIMER. *I live* on emotion.

LADY EPPING. Suppose a married woman had had a flirtation—with a young married man.

MISS MORTIMER (*with a great interest*). Oh!

LADY EPPING. It's for a play.

MISS MORTIMER. Oh! Can you get that past the Censor?

LADY EPPING. It was only a flirtation. After a time he left her vowing never to return.

MISS MORTIMER. Very sensible of him.

LADY EPPING. Yes, but of course that didn't suit *her*.

MISS MORTIMER. Oh, I see—*that* kind of a woman.

LADY EPPING. Not at all—but naturally she's not going to let him throw *her* over. She's going to throw him over.

MISS MORTIMER. Naturally.

LADY EPPING. So she has to see him once more. How is she to get him to come?

MISS MORTIMER. I should throw myself at his feet and crave a tryst.

LADY EPPING. I want sense, not sentiment. Would she make an appeal? Say, send him a letter that was a little stronger than usual?

MISS MORTIMER. I should think she would.

LADY EPPING. Would that bring him?

MISS MORTIMER. I should think it would.

LADY EPPING. That's what I should think. Will you excuse me if I write a note? I want to scribble a line to my sister.

MISS MORTIMER. Certainly, darling one.

(LADY EPPING sits at the writing-table.)

LADY EPPING. "My dear boy. I'm sorry I was cold —(*she crosses out "cold" and writes*) unkind this afternoon. Come in soon and be forgiven. This evening I am going to the play with my husband, but at a quarter to ten I will have a severe headache and leave the theatre alone. Call at ten and let us make it up. Yours, F.E." (*She puts the letter in an envelope.*) "Paul Hughes, Esquire."

(She rings the bell and seals the envelope.)

MISS MORTIMER. What is the play?

LADY EPPING. Only a situation I am working out to please myself. I don't think it will ever be published, at least I hope not. (Enter HENRY.) Take this letter.

HENRY. Yes, my lady. Is there any answer?

LADY EPPING. You can wait—and see if there's an answer.

HENRY. Thank you, my lady. (He exits.)

LADY EPPING. Now tell me your news.

MISS MORTIMER. I begin rehearsals of my new play to-morrow.

LADY EPPING. Oh, really—who is it by?

MISS MORTIMER. Paul Hughes.

LADY EPPING. How funny—why, you met him at *my* house.

MISS MORTIMER. Yes, my own angel, but—

LADY EPPING. And you have eight, if not nine, of *my* plays under consideration.

MISS MORTIMER. I know it, precious one,—and I should be producing them all now, one after another, if I had my way, but my stupid manager has already signed with Paul Hughes.

LADY EPPING. What is *his* play about?

MISS MORTIMER. I swore on my honour not to tell, but it won't do any harm to tell *you*. I'm a wife and my husband neglects me for his business, so I flirt with another man. That's the first two acts.

LADY EPPING (*indignantly*). Oh! (She recovers herself.) Go on.

MISS MORTIMER. The third act is where I get my great chance. I visit my lover late at night and then my husband comes, so I hide behind a curtain.

LADY EPPING (*breathlessly*). And the end ?

MISS MORTIMER. I go to the colonies.

LADY EPPING. But *that* is the plot of "Two Sins and a Woman."

MISS MORTIMER. It is the plot of nearly all the plays I ever acted in.

LADY EPPING. I told him that plot at Epping House. You can't produce it, Berry. I shall apply for an injunction.

MISS MORTIMER. That would advertise us nicely.

LADY EPPING. Who's your manager ?

MISS MORTIMER. Mr. Brooks.

LADY EPPING. I shall go and read my play to this Mr. Brooks to-morrow morning. (*She paces about the room.*) Oh, I can prove my case up to the hilt. Is he a person one can ask to luncheon ?

MISS MORTIMER. Who ?

LADY EPPING. This Mr. Banks—your manager.

MISS MORTIMER. Mr. Brooks.

LADY EPPING. He can come to tea anyway. I am disappointed in Mr. Hughes. I *did* think that at last I had found a genius who was a gentleman. Where is he to be found ?

MISS MORTIMER. Who ?

LADY EPPING. This Mr. Rivers—your manager.

MISS MORTIMER. Mr. Brooks. He is generally to be found at the Trafalgar Theatre.

LADY EPPING. I shall go and interview him first thing to-morrow morning. I shall say "Mr. Waters"—

MISS MORTIMER. Mr. Brooks.

LADY EPPING. Oh ! there was Vaneshla—the finest tragic part ever written—and I was willing to turn it into a comedy part to suit *you*. There was Lady Dorincourt—an exceptional opportunity for *dress*. She has a scene in which she tries on hats. You could have had the stage strewn with Paris models. But no—no—you prefer to take a play by Mr. Hughes—a man you met through me. I consider that you have behaved in a most scandalous manner, and I only keep silent because I am in my own house.

MISS MORTIMER. Don't stop, dear one. I am making a study of you. I have a great scene of indignation in the third act and I wasn't sure how to take it (LADY EPPING gives an exclamation of anger), but now I know. (*She rises and goes to the door.*) Good-bye, darling one, and thanks so much.

LADY EPPING (*with artificial graciousness*). Good-bye, Miss Mortimer. (*Exit MISS MORTIMER. Enter LORD EPPING by the other door.*) Oh, Epping!

LORD EPPING. Flora, why aren't you resting?

LADY EPPING. Oh, yes, I mustn't neglect my health. (*She sits on the sofa and puts her feet up.*) Oh, Epping, I've just received such a crushing blow. Sit down. (*LORD EPPING sits.*) Berry Mortimer is going to produce a play by Mr. Hughes, and it's *my* play. They've stolen it.

LORD EPPING. Good gracious!

LADY EPPING. I shall go to law.

LORD EPPING. No, Flora.

LADY EPPING. Am I to lie down and let them trample on me?

LORD EPPING. You really can't go to law with these people.

LADY EPPING. They deserve to be shown up.

LORD EPPING. I wish you'd give up writing plays. It's not fit work for a woman in *your* position.

LADY EPPING. Genius is not only to be found in low places. I consider it a possession of which *any* woman might be proud.

LORD EPPING. I know genius is not looked down upon as it used to be, and I don't think it ought to be, but I'm getting tired of the way we run after celebrities and turn Epping House into a Zoo every Saturday to Monday.

LADY EPPING. It is my pride that every shade of thought is represented at Epping House.

LORD EPPING. I don't object to *clever* people, but some of the people you get down there are just as stupid as our own relations. It's all very well for *you*. You amuse yourself with the wits, but *I* get left with the bores. I've had enough of them. Things have got to be changed, and this is a good place to begin. Let them steal your play and make that a reason for cutting the

whole gang. It's no use trying to shine at everything. You'll only get neuritis.

LADY EPPING (*with quiet decision*). I shall go to law.

LORD EPPING. I shan't pay your costs.

(Enter OSWALD quickly with a smiling face.)

OSWALD. I say, I've made it all right. (To LADY EPPING.) We are going to be married on the tenth of November at St. Peter's, Eaton Square.

LADY EPPING. I congratulate you, dear boy, but oh, Oswald! I am face to face with a grave crisis. My reputation is in jeopardy.

OSWALD (*pointedly*). What did I tell you?

LADY EPPING. My literary reputation. After thinking everything over very carefully from every point of view, I have at last decided to go to law. Epping refuses to pay my costs. To whom then can I turn but to you?

OSWALD. Oh! How much will the costs be?

LADY EPPING. I must have first-rate counsel. That may mean thousands of pounds.

OSWALD. You *know* I only have five hundred a year.

LADY EPPING. You *had*. But on November the tenth you are to marry an American heiress.

OSWALD. We are only engaged yet.

LADY EPPING. My ease won't come on before November.

OSWALD. I can't ask my wife to support my relations.

LORD EPPING (*to OSWALD*). I am *quite* well able to support my own wife.

LADY EPPING (*to LORD EPPING*). I know you are. But you won't do it. You throw me off just when you ought to rally round me.

OSWALD. Well, you must settle it among yourselves. I can't do anything.

(He moves away from them.)

LADY EPPING. Then my jewels must go.

LORD EPPING. Flora, you *shall not* go into court and make a fool of yourself.

LADY EPPING. *Shall not!* Do you say *shall not*?

LORD EPPING. Yes, I did, and I *mean* it.

LADY EPPING. Which of us has made the name of Epping what it is to-day?

LORD EPPING. I won't have my wife seeking cheap notoriety.

LADY EPPING. I think I shall know how to conduct myself in a Court of Law.

LORD EPPING. Nobody can be effective in a Court of Law except the Judge. You'll be fastened up in a loose box and forced to answer all sorts of questions. If you've any little secrets you don't want the world to know they'll have them all out of you.

OSWALD. That might be rather awkward.

(Enter HENRY.)

HENRY. If you please, my lady, I left your letter.

LADY EPPING. Very well—very well. You needn't come and tell me.

HENRY. If you please, my lady, you said I was to see if there was an answer.

LADY EPPING. Have the answer sent to my room.

HENRY. There isn't one, my lady; Mr. Hughes was out.

LADY EPPING. Oh!

HENRY. Mrs. Hughes opened the letter.

LADY EPPING. *Mrs. Hughes?*

HENRY. She said there wasn't any answer—yet.

(LADY EPPING waves him aside. Exit HENRY.)

OSWALD. That sounds ominous. I say, Flora—you can't go to law with him *now*.

LORD EPPING. Now! What do you mean by she can't go to law with him *now*?

OSWALD (*floundering*). Nothing—only—if she's written a letter to Hughes that his wife wasn't meant to see—

LADY EPPING. Idiot!

LORD EPPING. Was there anything in that letter that you wouldn't like the world to know?

LADY EPPING. Certainly not.

LORD EPPING. Oswald—will you please leave us?

LADY EPPING (*before OSWALD can do so*). Don't go, Oswald. We've nothing to say to each other you can't hear. (To LORD EPPING.) I suppose you'll be telling me next that my letter to Mr. Hughes will be read out in Court. As if it would matter if it *were*—a casual note—asking him to luncheon. However—as you're both so determined I will do as you wish. I won't go to law.

LORD EPPING. I see! You *daren't* go into Court.

LADY EPPING. Don't be absurd !

LORD EPPING. You're hiding something from me.

LADY EPPING. Nothing of the sort.

LORD EPPING. Will you *swear it* ?

LADY EPPING. Swear ! If I'm to be sworn and cross-examined I may as well go into Court at once. I must now—if it's only to vindicate my character. Oswald, ring up my solicitor.

OSWALD. No, Flora—I won't.

LADY EPPING. Don't, then. I'll do it myself. (*She snatches the receiver from the telephone and calls down it as the curtain falls.*) I'm going to law ! It's Lady Epping ! What number ? Oh—Holborn 123—3—1, 2, 3.

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE.—*Court-room X—King's Bench Division. The court-room is crowded when the curtain rises.*

JUDGE WRAY is enthroned opposite the audience. On his right hand is the vacant witness-box. In front of him and below him sits the ASSOCIATE at his desk with the USHER standing near. In front of the ASSOCIATE'S desk is the SOLICITOR'S table with LADY EPPING and her solicitor, LORD EPPING, LADY LUCY LISTER, and PAUL HUGHES and his solicitor seated round it. On the right of the witness-box and facing left are the twelve jurymen in the jury-box. Facing the jury-box are the benches where the COUNSEL sit. LADY EPPING is represented by MR. CRAVEN, K.C., and MR. HICKORY, and PAUL HUGHES by CLINTON PERRY. Besides all these people there are also present many barristers, solicitors' clerks, newspaper reporters and sketch artists, and general public. EVELYN HUGHES and MISS BERENGARIA MORTIMER are accommodated with chairs in front of the jury-box, and on the bench on either side of the JUDGE are seated LORD OSWALD BRUCE-BANNERMAN and MISS VANDERHIDE, who has now become LADY OSWALD BRUCE-BANNERMAN, LADY BEACROFT and other smartly dressed ladies.

HICKORY (rising and saying to WRAY). May it please your Lordship— (The rest of the speech to the JURY.) Gentlemen of the Jury, the Countess of Epping is the Plaintiff and Mr. Paul Hughes the Defendant. The claim is to recover damages for the infringement of copyright of a play written by plaintiff and entitled “Two Sins and a Woman,” and to restrain the defendant from again performing his play entitled “Smoke without Fire,” which we claim is substantially a copy of the said

play. The defendant has pleaded denying that "Smoke without Fire" is in any sense a copy of "Two Sins and a Woman." Upon these pleas issue is joined, and these are the issues you will have to try. (*He sits down.*)

CRAVEN (*rising and addressing WRAY*). May it please your lordship— (*To the JURY.*) Gentlemen of the Jury—

WRAY. I should like to mention here that the plaintiff is a personal friend of mine. Is there any objection to my hearing the case?

PERRY. Not the slightest, my lord.

LADY EPPING. On the contrary—

EVELYN (*to MISS MORTIMER*). She is trying to fascinate the Judge now; it isn't fair.

CRAVEN. This action is brought by the plaintiff to recover damages for the infringement of the copyright of her play "Two Sins and a Woman." The defendant is a professional dramatist, and, like other professional dramatists, is no doubt frequently hard up for a plot. We know that in such cases necessity is not always the Mother of Invention. The plaintiff herself will tell you how, on the tenth of July at Epping House—one of her ladyship's many country seats—she told the defendant the plot of her play "Two Sins and a Woman."

WRAY. Why didn't she call it "Three Sins"?

(*General laughter in which WRAY and every one but CRAVEN and LADY EPPING join. CRAVEN looks about him impatiently till the laughter has subsided before he proceeds.*)

CRAVEN. The plaintiff will also tell you how, a few minutes later, on the same day, she read extracts from the said play to the defendant, and how finally in the month of September she read him the whole of "Two Sins and a Woman," and the whole of sixteen other plays while they were both guests at Cookie Castle in Scotland.

WRAY. I thought I had seen it stated somewhere that Lady Epping had only written fifteen plays when she went to Cookie Castle.

CRAVEN. She wrote two more during the last week of August. (*To the JURY.*) Up to the end of the Cookie visit the relations between the plaintiff and the defendant seem to have been exceptionally—er—(*LADY EPPING clears her throat*) harmonious. It was not until Septem-

ber twenty-fifth that her ladyship began to suspect she had been nourishing a viper in her—er—entertaining a viper unawares. On that day the plaintiff received a call from Miss Berengaria Mortimer—(*all eyes are turned towards MISS MORTIMER, who poses complacently*) the celebrated actress. Miss Berengaria Mortimer informed Lady Epping that she had been engaged by Mr. Brooks of the Trafalgar Theatre to play the principal part in Mr. Paul Hughes' play "Smoke without Fire." When Lady Epping asked Miss Berengaria Mortimer to tell her the plot of the play, Miss Berengaria Mortimer told it—in the exact words Lady Epping had used to tell the plot of "Two Sins and a Woman" to Mr. Hughes. Gentlemen, our claim is not only that the whole of the plot of "Smoke without Fire" is copied from "Two Sins and a Woman." We claim that one of the scenes is copied, the situation at the end of the third act, and two lines of the dialogue—the lines "I love you" and "I hate you." Now, gentlemen, you are doubtless aware that "Smoke without Fire" was not a success, but we claim that if "Two Sins and a Woman" had been produced in its place it would have been a success, and that if it had been a success Lady Epping's sixteen other plays would have been produced and would have been successes too. It will be for you to calculate what her profits ought to have been.

WRAY. It seems to me, Mr. Craven, that would be almost as difficult to estimate as an income tax.

CRAVEN. It is not for me, my lord, to improve upon the methods of the present Government. (*To the JURY.*) Gentlemen, I hope you will remember that the plaintiff, though a countess, is also a woman—a woman in search of justice. Divest the noble plaintiff of her rank, her wealth, her regal residences, her servants, dogs, jewels, motor cars, and family plate—and picture her struggling up the ladder of Fame supported only by her pen. There I will leave her, gentlemen, and as you watch her and listen to her, remember that she suffers just what your own wives and daughters would have suffered in a similar situation: she has the same hopes and fears, difficulties and dangers, the same red blood tingling in her veins.

(*He sits down.*)

WRAY. I always thought a countess's blood was blue.
(*General laughter, in which WRAY joins.*)

HICKORY. Lady Epping—

(LADY EPPING enters the witness-box. *Her behaviour is modest, dignified, and attentive until she becomes at home. She appears unconscious of the interest she creates. The Sketch Artists set vigorously to work to draw her.*)

ASSOCIATE (*to LADY EPPING and gabbling almost incoherently*). Take the Book in your right hand. The evidenee you shall give to the Court and Jury, touching the matters in question, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Kiss the Book.

(LADY EPPING does so.)

LUCY (*to LORD EPPING*). Did you see her kiss the Book ? How sweet !

USHER. Sh ! Sh !

CRAVEN. You are Flora, Teresa, Maud, Adelaide, Platt-Byng, Countess of Epping, Viseountess Epping and Baroness Epping in the United Kingdom ; Baroness Leopardstown of Leopardstown in Ireland ; Viscountess Peak and Baroness Clack in England, and a Lady of Justicee of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem—the plaintiff ?

LADY EPPING. Yes.

CRAVEN. And you live at Epping House, Leopards-town Manor, Peak Park, Clack Court, and Berkeley Square ?

LADY EPPING. Yes.

CRAVEN. You have written a number of plays ?

LADY EPPING. Yes.

CRAVEN. Have any of your plays been produued ?

LADY EPPING. One of my plays was produued in the ball-room at Cookie Castle last September, with myself in the principal part, supported by several friends. The ball-room was crowded with several more friends and all the indoor and outdoor servants. We had a very great success.

CRAVEN. So that you would not consider yourself a noviee in matters conneeted with the stage ?

LADY EPPING. Certainly not, for I have also taken part in tableaux in some of the leading London theatres.

CRAVEN. Do you remember the tenth of July ?

LADY EPPING. Was that the day I made the acquaintance of Mr. Hughes ?

CRAVEN (*smiling graciously*). I am asking you.

LADY EPPING. Oh, then, I suppose it would be, otherwise you wouldn't have asked me—yes.

CRAVEN. What happened on the tenth of July ?

LADY EPPING. I made the acquaintance of Mr. Hughes.

CRAVEN. Yes.

LADY EPPING. Thank you. I thought him a very conceited young man.

WRAY. You are not allowed to say what you thought.

LADY EPPING. *I concluded* that he was a very conceited young man.

CRAVEN. Yes, yes—now—do you remember the fourteenth of July ?

LADY EPPING. The fourteenth—let me see—oh, yes ! (*Brightly to WRAY.*) That was the Sunday *you* spent with us !

WRAY (*smiling at LADY EPPING*). And very much I enjoyed it.

LADY EPPING. I'm so glad. *Do* come and see us again.

WRAY (*smiling at LADY EPPING*). M-m-m !

CRAVEN (*waiting with obtrusive patience to continue*). My lord, am I to continue my examination ?

WRAY. Certainly, Mr. Craven, certainly.

(*He leans back in his chair and becomes absorbed in his hands.*)

CRAVEN. What else do you remember about the fourteenth of July ?

LADY EPPING. I came into the drawing-room just before tea and found the two defendants—

WRAY (*smilingly*). There is only *one* defendant.

LADY EPPING (*to WRAY*). He knows what I mean. (*To CRAVEN.*) I began to tell them about my plays.

CRAVEN. What else ?

LADY EPPING. The conversation then became general. *I* talked while they listened.

CRAVEN. Did you tell them the plot of a particular play ?

LADY EPPING (*as if she thought that a very silly question*). Well, of course. That's what we're all here about.

CRAVEN. What was the title of the particular play ?

LADY EPPING. "Two Sins and a Woman."

CRAVEN. Did Mr. Hughes make any comment ?

LADY EPPING. None whatever. I see now that he must have been committing my plot to memory so that he could use it himself.

PERRY (*rising to protest*). My lord.

LADY EPPING (*stares at PERRY, then says to WRAY*). Is he allowed to interrupt me like that ?

WRAY. He is quite within his rights.

LADY EPPING. But I wasn't speaking to him at all. I was speaking to Mr. Craven.

WRAY. It would be better if you did not cast reflections on the defendant.

LADY EPPING. Very well, I'll accept that from *you* or Mr. Craven, but not from Mr. Perry. I'm not employing *him*.

CRAVEN. What happened *after* tea on the fourteenth of July ?

LADY EPPING. I read an extract from "Two Sins and a Woman" to the defendant.

CRAVEN. When did you next read "Two Sins and a Woman" to the defendant ?

LADY EPPING. At Cookie Castle in September.

CRAVEN. Do you remember the twenty-fifth of September ?

LADY EPPING (*playfully*). I thought you were going to say, "Do you remember the fifth of November ?"

WRAY. I think the exact quotation is, "Please to remember the fifth of November."

(*General and prolonged laughter, in which WRAY joins.*)

PERRY (*half rising as he says, smiling*). Another case of a plot which was suppressed.

(*A feeble laugh is raised at this jest, but it is immediately suppressed by the USHER.*)

WRAY (*sternly*). If there is any more of this levity I shall clear the Court.

CRAVEN (*who has been impatient during the jokes*). Do you recall on the twenty-fifth of September Miss Berengaria Mortimer coming to see you ?

LADY EPPING. I do.

WRAY. Who is Miss Berengaria Mortimer ?

MISS MORTIMER (*surprised and in a tone of disappointment*). Oh !

CRAVEN. The celebrated actress, my lord.

LADY EPPING (*smiling at WRAY*). Berry. You remember Berry !

WRAY (*in a reverie*). Garia ! (*He leans back as he says to CRAVEN.*) What are you waiting for, Mr. Craven ?

CRAVEN. What did Miss Berengaria Mortimer tell you ?

LADY EPPING (*with serious indignation*). The plot of Mr. Hughes' play—and no sooner had she let the cat out of the bag than I recognised it as my own child.

CRAVEN. Yes—well—now I think you saw the first performance of the defendant's play, "Smoke without Fire" ?

LADY EPPING. I did. I thought it very weak—except in the places where it resembles mine—the rest of it bored me. Lucy can tell you. She was with me. Lady Lucy Lister. (*Pointing.*) She's sitting over there.

(*Every one turns to look at LUCY, who appears unconscious of their gaze.*)

WRAY. Is Lady Lucy Lister to be called ?

CRAVEN. No, my lord.

WRAY (*graciously*). I'm sorry.

LUCY. So am I. (*She bows graciously to WRAY.*)

CRAVEN. What in your opinion are the salient points of resemblance between the two plays ?

LADY EPPING. The plots are just the same.

WRAY. Most plots are.

(*Prolonged laughter, in which WRAY joins.*)

CRAVEN. Do you find any of the dialogue similar ?

LADY EPPING. I do. In my play Lady Dorincourt says to the Duke of Vere, "I hate you." In Mr. Hughes' play Mrs. What's-her-name says precisely the same thing to Mr. Whatever-his-name-is, and they all four say, "I love you."

CRAVEN. Do you find any other resemblance ?

LADY EPPING. I do. Their third act passes in a bachelor's chambers at eleven o'clock at night, and so does mine.

CRAVEN. Are there any *scenes* in the two plays which you consider similar ?

LADY EPPING. Yes. The scenes at the ends of the third acts.

CRAVEN. Describe these scenes to the Jury in your own way.

LADY EPPING. Well, in *their* play the husband finds the wife in the lover's rooms, and there's a lot of talk and a kind of struggle and the wife flops over on the hearth-rug. (*Continuing with great dramatic emphasis and point in the description of her own play.*) Now, in *my* play, Lord Dorincourt tears the portière aside and discovers—Lady Dorincourt. “Lilian, is that you?” he says, and she says, “Yes.” Then he turns to the Duke of Vere and says, “I never thought you would do such a thing.” And the Duke stands like this—(*with her arms by her sides and her head bent*) never says a word—just stands like this. (*Holding the pose a moment before she continues excitedly.*) Then Lord Dorincourt seizes the Duke of Vere by the throat and forces him to his knees. Lady Dorincourt rushes between them crying (*her arms wide apart and shrieking*), “Kill me!” (*She drops her arms and smiles.*) That's my curtain.

WRAY (*pleasantly*). A very pretty incident. (CRAVEN sits. PERRY immediately rises. WRAY groans at the sight of PERRY.) Oh!

(*He sits back extremely bored. LADY EPPING'S attitude towards PERRY is stubborn and antagonistic. She looks upon him as her enemy. PERRY'S manner at the beginning is pompous.*)

PERRY. Is it not true that you offered to tell Mr. Hughes the plot of your play?

LADY EPPING. I don't remember.

PERRY. Do you suggest that he *asked* you to tell it him?

LADY EPPING. He may have done so.

PERRY. *Wormed* it out of you?

LADY EPPING. I don't think I know that expression.

PERRY. Was Mrs. Hughes present?

LADY EPPING. She may have been.

PERRY (*exasperated, shouting*). *Was* she?

LADY EPPING (*also shouting*). Yes!

PERRY. I suppose you will not deny that on Sunday afternoon, the fourteenth of July, while you were having tea with a number of friends, you announced your intention of collaborating on a play with Mr. Hughes?

LADY EPPING. You were there and heard me.

PERRY. Will you kindly say if this is not so ?

LADY EPPING. It may have been.

PERRY (*losing his temper*). I don't want "It may have been," I want "yes" or "no." (LADY EPPING begins to draw on her glove in a leisurely manner, quite ignoring PERRY, who becomes more exasperated.) Yes or no ? (*Pause.*) Yes or no ?

LADY EPPING (*pleasantly to WRAY*). Couldn't you come to us for Christmas ?

WRAY (*smiles*). M—— (*Solemnly*.) Now answer the question.

(*He busies himself with his notes.*)

LADY EPPING (*to PERRY*). Would you mind saying it all over again ? I've forgotten what you asked me.

PERRY (*disconcerted, he turns to a BARRISTER near him and says in a whisper*). Do you remember what it was ?

BARRISTER. I wasn't attending.

PERRY. We will pass on to—to—yes—now—this great success you say you had when you played your own play before your own servants.

LADY EPPING. I never said I played my own play before my own servants.

PERRY. Yes, you did.

LADY EPPING. No, I didn't.

PERRY. You said just now you had a great success at Cookie Castle before an audience mainly composed of servants.

LADY EPPING. Not *my servants*.

PERRY. Whose servants ?

LADY EPPING. My father's.

PERRY. Well, well, well, your father's servants then. We won't quarrel about that. I suppose your father's servants had to applaud you ?

LADY EPPING. Do you ?

PERRY. Had they ?

WRAY. That is a question for Lady Epping's father's servants.

LADY EPPING (*cheerfully*). A very good retort. I nearly made it myself. (*To PERRY*.) Well, anything else ?

PERRY. You are not allowed to ask me questions.

LADY EPPING. My own side will correct me when necessary.

PERRY. This question of the third acts both passing in a bachelor's chambers. I suppose you don't think you have the exclusive right to use a bachelor's chambers at 11 o'clock at night.

LADY EPPING (*indignantly*). How dare you say such a thing? As if I should ever dream—

PERRY. I mean—to use them—in an artistic sense.

LADY EPPING. Don't attempt to explain; let us pass away from this very disagreeable incident.

PERRY. "I love you."

LADY EPPING (*surprised, she draws herself up*). Mr. Perry!

PERRY. "I hate you."

LADY EPPING (*realising that he is quoting from her play*). Oh, I see.

WRAY (*waking up*). What was that? Really, Mr. Perry, I must take exception to your language.

PERRY. I was quoting Lady Epping.

WRAY. That's no excuse. Lady Epping is not supposed to know the etiquette of the Court, and you are.

PERRY. I am obliged to your lordship. These lines "I love you" and "I hate you"—don't you realise that they are very commonplace?

LADY EPPING. I do now.

PERRY. Didn't you realise that as you wrote them?

LADY EPPING. No—it was as you spoke them.

(*Slight general laughter.*)

PERRY. I really must ask you to treat me with more respect.

LADY EPPING (*smiling indulgently*). Poor little Mr. Perry!

PERRY (*indignantly*). Oh!

(*He sits down nearly crying with rage.*)

CRAVEN. Lady Epping—it has been suggested that you insisted on telling Mr. Hughes the plot of your play?

LADY EPPING. Only by Mr. Perry.

CRAVEN. Is it true that you forced your play on the defendant's attention?

LADY EPPING. No. He wormed it out of me.

CRAVEN. Thank you.

(*He sits down.*)

LADY EPPING. Can I come out? (CRAVEN bows to her. Leaving the witness-box, she says to WRAY). Good-bye! (She waves her hand to him—then rejoins LORD EPPING.) Now are you satisfied?

USHER. Sh, sh!

LADY EPPING (*staring at the USHER*). I'm the plaintiff. (*Sits beside LORD EPPING*.)

CRAVEN (*to WRAY*). That is the plaintiff's case, my lord. (*He then sits*.)

PERRY (*rising to address WRAY*). May it please your lordship—

WRAY (*groaning at the sight of PERRY*). Oh!

PERRY. Gentlemen of the Jury—My learned friend, in his opening speech, asked you to remember that the plaintiff, though a countess, is also a woman. At the same time he has lost no opportunity of reminding you that, though a woman, she is also a countess—as if on that account she has a special claim upon your sympathies. Now, gentlemen—I hope you will not be snobs, but, like the free-born lower-middle class Britons that you probably are, you will support a poor defendant against a rich plaintiff—whatever the rights of the case. (*Dropping his voice to a sad tone*.) The defendant, gentlemen, is no charming woman—such as you have just seen. He is merely—a man. (*With sudden fire*.) But he is an Englishman!

A BOY. Hooray!

PERRY. —with all those fine and noble qualities which have made Englishmen—what we are,—courage, veracity, brawn, all the domestic and conjugal virtues coupled with a taste for sport. Could such a man be guilty of robbing a woman? This story, gentlemen, which Lady Epping claims to have invented is literally as old as Adam. Who are the eternal hero, heroine, and villain of drama but Adam and Eve and the Serpent? Boil almost every play down to its component parts and you find our three old friends at the bottom of the pot. (*Working himself up to a final burst of indignation*.) Are we to hand over the copyright of the book of Genesis to Lady Epping? Did she create Adam and Eve? Is she the author of their fall? Did she invent sin, and are we not to be allowed to participate in it? Gentlemen, are you going to surrender this precious heritage, or will

you rise in your might and give a brother Englishman fair play !

(He sits down exhausted by his great effort. There is some applause.)

USHER. Sh, sh !

WRAY. This demonstration is really most uncalled for.

PERRY *(rising and still exhausted)*. Mr. Paul Hughes.

EVELYN *(to MISS MORTIMER)*. He'll never be able to answer their questions ; he'll be worse than he was at the interview.

(PAUL enters the witness-box.)

ASSOCIATE *(gabbling incoherently as before)*. Take the Book in your right hand. The evidence you shall give to the Court and Jury touching the matter in the question shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Kiss the Book.

(PAUL kisses the Book and returns it.)

PERRY. You are the defendant, and you live at "Monrepos," Edgware Road ?

PAUL. Yes, my lord.

WRAY. Please don't address Mr. Perry as My lord.

PAUL *(to WRAY)*. No, sir.

WRAY *(severely)*. Don't be facetious.

PAUL. I didn't mean to—

WRAY. Don't talk so much *(as he leans back)*. I really must put a stop to all this chattering and frivolity.

PERRY. Do you remember the fourteenth of July ?

PAUL. Yes, my wife and I were staying at Epping House. Lady Epping read me extracts from several of her plays.

PERRY. Tell us briefly the circumstances.

PAUL. It was after tea. *(To WRAY.)* You'd just gone out for a walk with Lady Beacroft—

WRAY. Address your remarks to the Jury.

PAUL *(to JURY)*. The Judge and Lady Beacroft—

WRAY *(interrupting impatiently)*. No, no, no. We don't want this.

PERRY. Did you steal any of Lady Epping's ideas ? *(CRAVEN laughs. PERRY angrily to CRAVEN.)* Don't interrupt while I am examining the witness. *(To PAUL.)* Did you steal any of Lady Epping's ideas ?

WRAY. That is a question for the Jury, Mr. Perry.

PERRY. I am obliged to your lordship. (*To PAUL.*) Then I may take it you did *not* steal any of Lady Epping's ideas ?

PAUL. No. (*He adds hastily.*) Yes.

WRAY (*impatiently*). Which d'you mean—no or yes ?

PAUL. If he means did I steal them, I mean—

WRAY (*angrily*). Don't trifle with the Court, Mr. Hughes. Remember you are on your oath.

PAUL (*submissively*). Yes.

WRAY (*to PERRY*). Yes. He *did* steal them.

PAUL (*desperately*). No.

WRAY (*exasperated*). Well, which is it ? Yes or no ?

PERRY. I think he means "yes."

CRAVEN (*springing up*). I object to the way my learned friend is leading the witness.

PERRY (*pompously*). I will put the question in another way. Did you or did you not steal any of Lady Epping's ideas ? (*CRAVEN laughs. PERRY losing his temper.*) My lord, I cannot proceed with my examination if my friend continues to titter at everything I say.

CRAVEN. I didn't titter. I laughed.

WRAY (*angrily*). You tittered.

WRAY (*looking up suddenly*). Eh ? What's the matter ? (*Angrily to PAUL.*) Why don't you answer the questions ? Stand up straight and take your hands out of your pockets. You are a most unsatisfactory witness.

EVELYN (*to MISS MORTIMER*). Isn't the Judge hard upon him ?

PERRY. Your play "Smoke without Fire" did not run very long, I think ?

PAUL. Three weeks.

PERRY. Ah ! A complete failure.

PAUL. A succès d'estime.

PERRY. In spite of your play being such a disastrous succès d'estime, Lady Epping claims to be the author ?

PAUL. She says our plots are just alike.

WRAY. I once heard a learned judge say, "Most plots are."

(*General laughter, in which WRAY joins.*)

PERRY (*to WRAY*). That is our defence, my lord. Our author claims that it is impossible to write an entirely original play. They have all been written.

One more question: Is your play, in your opinion, entirely original?

PAUL. It is.

(PERRY, having finished his examination, sits.
CRAVEN rises to cross-examine.)

CRAVEN. We have heard that on Sunday afternoon, the fourteenth of July, the plaintiff read you an extract from "Two Sins and a Woman."

PAUL. Yes.

CRAVEN. The play was produced—

WRAY (interrupting). But I thought it never was produced.

CRAVEN (irritably to WRAY). If your lordship will allow me to finish my sentence—(to PAUL) the play was produced from a black tin box. (To his CLERK.) Have we the black tin box in Court?

(The CLERK produces the black tin box which was used in the first act.)

WRAY. As you can't produce the play, you produce the black tin box.

(Prolonged laughter, in which WRAY joins.)

CRAVEN (to PAUL). Is that the box in which Lady Epping keeps her plays?

PAUL. I believe so.

CRAVEN. Did you see that box at Cookie Castle?

PAUL. Yes—I think so.

CRAVEN (impressively). No—don't think so—be sure.

PAUL. Yes.

WRAY. Let me see the box. (It is handed up to WRAY, who taps it, then opens it and peers inside.) I think the Jury ought to see this. (As ASSOCIATE rises slowly.) Make haste please or I may drop it on the Usher's head.

(It is handed to the JURY.)

CRAVEN. There is a remarkable thing about that box. It won't lock. (A sensation in Court.) You had easy access to that box?

PAUL. No.

CRAVEN. But it won't lock.

PAUL. Oh!

CRAVEN. I suggest to you that the box won't lock.

PAUL. I'll take your word for it.

CRAVEN. I further suggest that it was perfectly simple

for you to take the play out of the box had you so desired.

PAUL. No.

CRAVEN. You knew where Lady Epping kept the box ?

PAUL. Yes.

WRAY. Where did she keep it ?

PAUL. Under her bed.

(*Laughter, immediately suppressed.*)

CRAVEN. You are a successful dramatist ?

PAUL. I believe so.

CRAVEN. Altogether a most exemplary young man.

PAUL. That is a question for the Jury.

WRAY (*sweetly to CRAVEN*). Will you give us your definition of an exemplary young man, Mr. Craven ?

(*Prolonged laughter, in which WRAY joins.*)

CRAVEN (*impressively*). Indirectly, my lord—by proving that the defendant is not one.

(*A general rustle in Court, murmurs, movement, whispering, etc.*)

LUCY (*to LORD EPPING*). That's what they call sensation !

USHER. Sh, sh !

CRAVEN. My learned friend in his opening speech scorned the suggestion that you have robbed Lady Epping because you are such a model of all the domestic and conjugal virtues.

PAUL. Yes.

CRAVEN. As a matter of fact, I think you are separated from your wife.

PAUL (*eagerly*). I can explain that.

CRAVEN (*severely*). I won't trouble you for an explanation. You are separated from your wife ?

PAUL. It's all about a letter.

CRAVEN. What letter ?

PAUL. A letter which was addressed to me and which fell into my wife's hands.

CRAVEN. A compromising letter ?

PAUL (*hesitating*). Well—

WRAY (*severely*). Answer the question. Was the letter compromising ?

PAUL. Yes—

CRAVEN (*triumphantly*). Ah !

PAUL. —in a way.

WRAY. Do stop talking. I never heard anything like the way you run on with irrelevant remarks. Who was the letter from?

PAUL. I don't remember.

WRAY. Don't remember! Don't remember!

PAUL. No, my lord—I do not remember.

CRAVEN. My lord, I believe Mrs. Paul Hughes is in Court. No doubt she will remember.

PAUL (*losing his head*). No, she doesn't. Neither of us do, but if your lordship insists, I will write the lady's name on a piece of paper.

WRAY. Yes, you'd better. (*PAUL writes a name on a page of his pocket-book. It is passed to WRAY. WRAY reads the paper, then gives a little scream of surprise and amusement.*) Oh!

(*He leans back in his chair, smiling, covers his face with his handkerchief and ogles LADY EPPING over the top of it.*)

PERRY (*with the letter in his hand*). My lord, it was not my intention to use this letter, but since my friend has introduced the subject I propose to put it in as evidence.

WRAY. Evidence of what?

PERRY. Evidence that this is nothing but a trumped-up case.

CRAVEN (*springs up, protesting*). Oh! my lord!

WRAY. Sit down, Mr. Craven.

(*CRAVEN does so, and leaning over, reads the letter in PERRY'S hand.*)

PERRY. I submit that this letter clearly shows that the plaintiff and the defendant had quarrelled—that it was a quarrel of a most private and intimate character. I further submit that her ladyship's only motive in bringing this action is revenge.

CRAVEN (*rising*). My lord, this letter cannot be material to any of the issues raised.

WRAY. It was you who introduced the letter, Mr. Craven. I think we must have it.

LADY EPPING (*to CRAVEN*). No, no!

PERRY. I will read the letter. It begins——

CRAVEN. My lord, I protest——

LADY EPPING (*to CRAVEN*). Snatch it.

PERRY (*holding the letter high up so that CRAVEN cannot snatch it, and raising his voice to be heard*). "My dear——"

CRAVEN (*protesting*). My lord——

PERRY. "My dear——"

WRAY (*raising his voice angrily*). Gentlemen, gentlemen! Perhaps it will be sufficient if *I* read the letter.

PERRY. As your lordship pleases.

(*The letter is handed to WRAY, who reads it with an expression of surprise and amusement.*)

WRAY. I think we must hear what the plaintiff has to say about this letter. Let Lady Epping come back into the box.

(*LADY EPPING is reluctant to re-enter the box. LORD EPPING, CRAVEN, and her SOLICITOR urge her. She rises slowly and goes towards the box, meeting PAUL as he steps out of it so that they almost collide. PAUL steps aside and says, "I beg your pardon."* LADY EPPING enters the box.)

PERRY. Hand the letter to witness. (*The letter is taken from WRAY and handed to LADY EPPING.*) Did you write that letter?

LADY EPPING (*sweetly*). I must read it before I can be sure, mustn't I?

(*She peruses the letter.*)

PERRY. Did you write that letter?

LADY EPPING. It is something like my writing.

PERRY (*triumphantly*). Ah!

LADY EPPING. That's not saying I wrote it.

PERRY. You admit the writing resembles yours.

LADY EPPING. But there's so much similarity in handwriting, you see. Modern women are so much alike. We talk alike and dress alike, and all look about thirty, so it's not surprising if we all write alike.

PERRY. I am not asking you for general statements. I am asking you if you wrote that letter.

LADY EPPING. I submit it has no bearing on the issues.

WRAY (*sharply*). Answer the question.

LADY EPPING (*floundering*). The question!

PERRY. Did you write——?

LADY EPPING. I write so many letters.

PERRY. Did you——?

LADY EPPING. I'm trying to think.

PERRY. Did—?

LADY EPPING. September the twenty-fifth. Now what did I do on September the twenty-fifth? Oh, I know—I went to Peckham to open some baths and then—then—

WRAY (*shouting*). Did you write that letter?

LADY EPPING (*pretending to read the letter*). "Dear Mr. Hughes. Can you lunch here on Tuesday? Just ourselves. Do come. F. Epping." I can quite believe I wrote that. I write dozens and dozens of letters every day.

EVELYN (*to MISS MORTIMER*). Oh, that wasn't the letter she wrote at all.

LADY EPPING. How can I possibly remember them all three months after? Who could? (*She tears the letter into little bits as she says recklessly.*) Ask any woman if she can remember.

(*As soon as LADY EPPING begins to tear up the letter, PERRY flies to the witness-box to try and stop her. General movement. The whole Court rises in great excitement shouting and gesticulating.*)

PERRY. Stop, stop! My lord!

WRAY. Lady Epping! Lady Epping!

USHER (*dancing about in front of the witness-box*). Hi! Hi! Stop that!

LADY EPPING. Go away. (*She waves USHER and PERRY aside.*) Oh, look what I've done!

(*She scatters the bits of paper with both hands. The people in Court resume their seats.*)

WRAY (*solemnly*). Are you aware that you have committed two most grave offenses?

LADY EPPING (*alarmed*). What?

WRAY. Your conduct amounts to perjury and contempt of Court.

LADY EPPING. What?

WRAY. You have sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, yet you deliberately make false statements and destroy documentary evidence. Never have I met with anything so flagrant. I must commit you to the cells.

LADY EPPING (*uttering a piercing shriek*). Oh! (Great

sensation in Court. Much movement and incoherent talking. LADY EPPING moaning when silence is restored). The cells! (*Hysterically to WRAY.*) Oh, my lord—how should I know I'd committed a crime? I'm very sorry. I'll apologize to the whole bar.

WRAY (*restraining her with a gesture*). You really did not know you were committing an offence in tearing up that letter?

LADY EPPING. No, no—indeed I didn't. I tore it up—because I always tear up letters as I've read them. I never thought I should be sent to prison for it.

WRAY (*to COUNSEL*). I think we had better accept Lady Epping's apology and proceed with the case.

LADY EPPING (*distractedly*). Oh, no, no. Let's drop it and get out. (*To CRAVEN and PERRY.*) You two settle it between you. I'll pay all the costs out of my own pocket. If you can't get the money from my husband, try my sister-in-law—(*points to MISS VANDERHIDE*) Lady Oswald Bruce-Bannerman. I withdraw my case.

WRAY. You may withdraw your case if you choose, but to withdraw it now looks rather—

LADY EPPING. My lord—may I be allowed to explain?

WRAY. Certainly.

LADY EPPING. May it please your lordship, gentlemen of the jury—it has nothing to do with the letter. I withdraw my case because I have no case to withdraw. Mr. Craven ought never to have allowed me to bring this action. (*CRAVEN bangs his papers down on to the bench in front of him in a great rage.*) I saw that during Mr. Perry's very able speech . . . (*PERRY rises and bows*) about Adam and Eve and Satan. This is not a case of plagiarism at all. It is a case of coincidence—one of those instances of two clever people both thinking the same thing. I will only add—I'm surprised Mr. Craven couldn't see it.

(*HICKORY laughs; CRAVEN turns upon him angrily.*)

WRAY. Before the Court rises, I should like to compliment everybody concerned upon the able way in which this case has been conducted. I agree with Lady Epping it should never have been brought, yet the experience will not have been in vain if it teaches both the plaintiff and the defendant the folly of trying to

shine outside their legitimate spheres. Mr. Hughes, the author—posing as a man of fashion : Lady Epping, not content with her countess's coronet, trying to find room on her head for a wreath of laurel leaves. What a sorry spectacle ! As incongruous as if a judge should mistake himself for a jester. (*Loud laughter from every one in Court except WRAY, who looks indignantly around him. The USHER, seeing they are laughing in the wrong place, at once excitedly quells the laughter. There is immediate silence.*) Mr. Hughes, my advice to you is this—Get out of the smart set as quickly as you can and stick to your work and your wife. (*To LADY EPPING.*) Lady Epping—you have told us it is your habit to tear up your letters.

LADY EPPING. Yes.

WRAY. Extend it to your plays.

CURTAIN.

CAPTAIN DREW ON LEAVE

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION
AT THE
NEW THEATRE, LONDON

CAPTAIN DREW ON LEAVE

BY

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

<i>Captain Drew, R.N.</i>	.	.	.	.	SIR CHARLES WYNDHAM
<i>Mr. White</i>	.	.	.	.	MR. VANE TEMPEST
<i>Mr. Hassell</i>	.	.	.	.	MR. EILLE NORWOOD
<i>Mr. Moxon</i>	.	.	.	.	MR. LOUIS CALVERT
<i>Mrs. Moxon</i>	.	.	.	.	MISS MARION TERRY
<i>Miss Mills</i>				.	MISS MARY MOORE

Acts I., II., and IV.—Mrs. Moxon's Drawing-room.

One month passes between Acts I. and II.

Act III.—The Studio in Mr. White's garden.

A night passes between Acts III. and IV.

The action takes place in a rural district of England in summer time.

CAPTAIN DREW ON LEAVE

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE.—MRS. MOXON'S *drawing-room*. *It is a pleasant room in a substantial country house. The furniture is good, but not new, and rather early Victorian in style. There is a door on the right-hand side, and an open French window opposite the audience. A fireplace on the right side is filled with potted plants, and on the left-hand wall hangs a mirror. An armchair stands upon either side of fireplace. Nearer the front of the stage, and still to the right, is a round seat with places for three people to sit back to back. Opposite is a round table with a shelf under it on which reposes a stout leather photograph album. On the table are a vase of roses and two or three books, and to right and left of it some chairs. Farther back, beside the armchair to the right of the fireplace, there is a large round work-basket containing skeins of red wool. A large framed photograph of Queen Victoria occupies a prominent place on the wall beside the French windows.*

(As the curtain rises there enter CAPTAIN DREW, R.N., and ERNEST WHITE. CAPTAIN DREW is a breezy, high-spirited man about forty-five, rather weather-beaten in appearance and young in manner. He wears civilian dress. ERNEST WHITE is rather younger. He has a good appearance; but in manner he is fussy, and apt to be anxious.)

DREW. You never told me who these people are. Who is it that you've brought me to see?

WHITE. The Moxons.

DREW. Any daughters?

WHITE. No. Just Mr. and Mrs. Moxon and their two little boys. They're nice, simple people—rather dull, but very kind.

DREW (*disappointed*). I told you to take me to see some girls.

WHITE. Really, Hal—the way you go on about girls is hardly nice.

DREW (*seriously*). If you'd been out of England months and months at a stretch and seen no one but your own ship's crew and the sort of people one meets in the South American ports, you'd understand what women mean to us when we come home. (*Humorously*.) And it's a great chance for the girls. Even the plain ones pass for pretty—and the beauties—what angels the little devils look!

WHITE (*looking at door and window uneasily to see if they are overheard*). Do be careful.

DREW. From your description of the Moxons I shan't need to hold myself in very hard.

WHITE (*diffidently*). There's a Miss Mills—a friend of theirs, such a fascinating girl.

DREW. Then let us leave cards on the Moxons and go and call on Miss Mills. (*Makes ready to go*.)

WHITE. But she's staying here.

DREW (*delighted*). Miss Mills is?

WHITE. Yes. (*Smiling*.) She's so pretty.

DREW (*smiling*). Ah!

WHITE. And quite an heiress.

DREW (*promptly*). She'll do.

WHITE (*looking uneasily at DREW*). I didn't know you were thinking of getting married.

DREW. I'm not.

WHITE (*pointedly*). Miss Mills, of course, is a lady.

DREW. Just what I'm looking for; a woman who can appreciate the finer shades of love-making. (*Turning to the window and indicating the view from it*.) And in these woods and lanes of yours—what chances!

WHITE (*trying to be severe and shaking his head*). Now, Hal, I can't introduce you here if you are going to begin any of your wickedness. I won't take the responsibility.

DREW (*mocking WHITE good-humouredly by shaking his head at him*). There won't be any responsibility.

(*Pauses and smiles as he adds.*) My indiscretions are always discreet.

WHITE (*hotly*). I shall warn Miss Mills.

DREW (*amused*). Are you her guardian?

WHITE (*embarrassed*). I can hardly call myself that—yet.

DREW. Oh, I see. I won't spoil your game, of course. I renounce Miss Mills. It's hard to give her up so soon. But if you want her, I'll—(*pauses and says cheerfully*) I'll make love to Mrs. Moxon. (WHITE *laughs*.) Why not?

WHITE (*smiling*). Wait till you see her.

DREW (*anxiously*). Is she such a fright?

WHITE. Oh, no. She's a very nice woman, and not at all bad-looking.

DREW (*confidently*). Then I see no reason against it.

WHITE (*seriously*). She's not the kind of woman that even a sailor would think of making love to.

DREW. I admit no such kind.

WHITE. She's so proper.

DREW. Oh, but I could tell you the most surprising cases. (*Glances quickly at door and window, moves nearer to WHITE, and lowers his voice a little.*) I once met a missionary on her way to Japan—

WHITE (*interrupting*). Yes, yes. I know that story. (DREW *smiles to himself*.) But with Mrs. Moxon it's not only that she's so strait-laced. It's her nature. She never thinks about men—in that way.

DREW (*turning to WHITE*). How do you know what way she thinks about them?

WHITE. You can always tell a woman by the way she walks and talks and looks at you, and by the kind of clothes she wears. Mrs. Moxon's dresses look as if she chose them solely for their durability.

DREW. And a very good thing to choose them for.

WHITE. She fastens her hat on with elastic.

DREW. Much better than those long beastly hatpins. I nearly had my eye put out in Portsmouth.

WHITE. Anyhow, it's no use trying to make an impression on Mrs. Moxon—because you can't.

DREW (*annoyed, takes stage up and down*). Don't tell me I can't. It annoys me to be told I can't do things. You think a woman isn't a woman unless she's

a pretty girl, like that insipid little What's-her-name—the heiress.

WHITE (*indignantly*). Oh—you've no right to run down Miss Mills in that way.

DREW (*humorously*). You ran down my Mrs. Moxon.

WHITE. I didn't. I only told you the kind of woman she is, and even if she wasn't—you are not at all the kind of man she'd approve of. (*Sits huffily*.)

DREW (*sits on table, before he says*). Is it your experience that women invariably fall in love with the men they approve of?

WHITE. You seem very sure of a conquest.

DREW. You think that's vanity. It's not. It's science. Any man can make any woman fall in love with him, provided she is not in love with some one else. It's only a question of using the right method. Most men have only one method for all women. They go bungling along with a vague idea that women are all alike. Why, you might as well say that the cat tribe contains only the ordinary household cat. You must classify your woman before you go ahead—flirt, prude, sentimental, hysterical, and so on. If you do it carefully—you never need get scratched.

WHITE (*quietly*). You know there's a Mr. Moxon.

DREW. Oh, yes. What sort of a fellow is Moxon?

(Enter MR. and MRS. MOXON. MR. MOXON enters first. He is a large man about forty, rather dull and heavy, but not bad-natured. His ungallant manner towards his wife is not the result of cruelty or dislike, but of indifference, owing to their long uninteresting union. He wears country clothes—a brown or grey suit. His clothes are of good quality, but he evidently takes no care of his appearance. His suit needs pressing, and he is not trim about the neck. MRS. MOXON follows her husband on and closes the door. She is a gentle but apparently uninteresting creature whose mind and emotions have become sluggish. In appearance she is dowdy but not eccentric. She wears a dull cloth dress, with no pretensions to style, and old-fashioned stays. Her hair is unbecomingly done, but her appearance is not untidy. As they enter DREW and WHITE rise.

WHITE (*going towards the MOXONS, shakes hands with MR. MOXON*). Ah, Moxon—may I introduce my cousin, Captain Drew.

MOXON. Oh. (*Going towards DREW*.) Very pleased to make your acquaintance.

DREW. Thanks. (*DREW is about to go and shake hands with MRS. MOXON when MR. MOXON interposes his own hand*.) Oh, how d'ye do? (*Shakes hands with MOXON, then with MRS. MOXON. Stands between them*.)

MOXON. I understand it's some time since you were in dear old England.

DREW. I've scarcely been at home at all for years. So as soon as I arrived I went straight off to London on the bust. (*WHITE looks at DREW and laughs*.) I should say I've been spending a few most agreeable days in London, and I drifted down here yesterday.

MOXON. Yesterday—ah. And what are you going to do with yourself in this dull place?

DREW (*glancing at WHITE*). White and I were just discussing that.

WHITE (*hurriedly*). We shall ride and play golf and go for walks.

DREW. In the day-time. (*Glances at MRS. MOXON*.) But, of course, there are the evenings.

MRS. MOXON. There are several nice games that two can play. (*DREW smiles at WHITE*.)

WHITE. She means you and me.

MRS. MOXON. There is chess, or draughts, or dominoes, or bezique, or—

MOXON (*to MRS. MOXON*). We are all waiting for you to sit down.

(*MRS. MOXON immediately crosses in front of the others and seats herself near the table. DREW sits on the ottoman, WHITE on the round seat. MOXON stands by chair in the centre of the stage, facing audience*.)

DREW. What jolly country it is about here!

MRS. MOXON. Is it not?

DREW. The only thing that spoils it is that great, ugly ironworks, or whatever it is, over there. (*Points to window*.)

WHITE. Oh!

DREW (*turning to WHITE*). Eh?

MOXON (*standing at back of MRS. MOXON'S chair, with dignity*). That is my Bleach Works.

DREW (*not knowing what to say*). Oh ! You bleach, do you ? Ah, charming profession. (*To WHITE*.) Ernest, why don't you bleach or do something useful ?

WHITE (*helplessly*). I can't work. It would be no use me trying.

MRS. MOXON (*complacently*). I think every one should do some work.

MOXON (*looking at WHITE with disapproval*). Certainly.

(Enter MISS MILLS. *She is a pretty, coquettish young woman, stylishly dressed. She wears a hat.*)

MISS MILLS. Well, here you all are !

WHITE (*rising as MISS MILLS enters, goes towards her rather effusively*). Oh, Miss Mills. How do you do ? I'm so pleased.

MISS MILLS (*takes no notice of WHITE, but smiles at DREW, who also rises*). Will you introduce me, please ?

MOXON (*to MRS. MOXON*). Aren't you going to ?

MRS. MOXON. Oh !

WHITE (*introducing them*). Captain Drew, Miss Mills.

(MISS MILLS goes quickly towards DREW and shakes hands.)

MISS MILLS. I suppose you thought I was Mrs. Moxon's daughter ?

DREW (*embarrassed*). Oh, no. (MISS MILLS looks slightly piqued.) Not that you look too old to be her daughter. (MISS MILLS smiles. MRS. MOXON looks towards DREW.) Only she looks too young to be your mother. (MRS. MOXON looks away, indifferent to the compliment. DREW says to MISS MILLS.) Please don't ask me any more like that.

WHITE (*approaches MISS MILLS, smiling*). Well, Miss Mills.

MISS MILLS (*distantly to WHITE*). Quite well, thank you. (*To DREW*.) Shall we sit down, Captain Drew ? (*She crosses to the round seat. DREW follows her. They sit.*)

WHITE. It is so unfortunate. You know, I've only furnished one bedroom at my place at present, the one I use myself—so I've had to do a makeshift for Hal.

MOXON. I suppose a sailor can curl up anywhere.

MISS MILLS (*who keeps looking admiringly at DREW*). Just slings up a hammock, I expect.

DREW. He loves a real bed, one that he can kick about in.

MISS MILLS (*smiling*). What a good description.

WHITE. I've put Hal in the studio at the end of the garden. You know a painter had the house before me, and he built rather a good studio.

MOXON (*to DREW*). A bit lonely, I should say.

DREW. I don't mind that, only (*smiling*) it seems rather a sin not to be carrying on a flirtation. Such an ideal spot for secret meetings.

(MISS MILLS is the only one who laughs. MRS.

MOXON turns from DREW with marked disapproval. MOXON gets his hat from the cabinet.)

MRS. MOXON (*to WHITE*). How are your rose-trees doing this summer?

WHITE. Pretty well.

MRS. MOXON. Our John Hoppers are suffering from green-fly, but the William Allen Richardsons are doing well.

MOXON. I'm sorry I must leave you, gentlemen, but I'm due at the works.

MRS. MOXON (*to MOXON*). You did not tell me you were going back to the works to-day.

MOXON. Well, my dear, I suppose I don't need to come and tell you every time I make a business appointment.

MRS. MOXON. Of course not, dear, if you don't wish to.

MOXON. I didn't say I didn't wish to.

MRS. MOXON. I didn't mean anything, George—at least, to be strictly truthful, I only meant it is Saturday afternoon.

MOXON. Yes, well, I've been so busy all week, I have to sign my letters this afternoon. (*Nods to WHITE.*) Good-day, White.

WHITE. Good-day.

MOXON. Good-day, Captain Drew.

DREW. Good-day, Mr. Moxon.

MOXON (*crosses to the window, but stops*). Oh! (*He goes to MRS. MOXON, bends down, and kisses her on the cheek. She receives the kiss passively. MOXON goes out quickly.*)

DREW (*to MISS MILLS*). Is Mr. Moxon going on a journey?

MISS MILLS (*wondering*). No. He'll be home to dinner. (*Sees DREW's meaning.*) Oh, you mean because he kissed her?

DREW. Yes.

MISS MILLS. He always does when he goes to the works; ever since they were married.

DREW. What a charming attention!

MISS MILLS. I think it is only a habit now.

(*Their attention is attracted by MRS. MOXON, who rises abruptly and hurries to the window, as she does so taking a handkerchief from her pocket.*)

DREW. I'm afraid Mrs. Moxon is going to be ill. (*MRS. MOXON waves her handkerchief from window.*) Oh, I thought she was going to be ill.

MISS MILLS. It's nothing. She always waves her handkerchief when Mr. Moxon turns the corner.

DREW (*to MISS MILLS*). Another habit?

MISS MILLS. Yes. Isn't it silly to keep it up so many years?

DREW. Perhaps neither of them likes to suggest stopping it.

MISS MILLS. *I'd* stop it with my husband soon enough. Of course, I haven't one yet. (*Confidentially.*) I'm not engaged, either.

DREW (*turns quickly to her*). Not engaged; you don't say so.

WHITE (*overhearing her*). Oh, I say.

MISS MILLS. Look at Mr. White. He's so angry with you.

DREW. Why?

MISS MILLS (*anxiously*). Why—and you a sailor and ask that. (*Crosses to the table.*) Aren't these roses pretty? I arranged them. (*Touching the roses, says sweetly.*) I whisper all my secrets to the roses.

DREW. Is that why they look so red in the face?

(*They sit on chairs near the table and converse in an animated fashion.*)

MRS. MOXON (*taking a floral catalogue from the table, crosses with it to WHITE*). Have you seen this new floral catalogue?

WHITE (*who watches DREW and MISS MILLS jealously all the time he is talking to MRS. MOXON*). No.

MRS. MOXON (*opening the catalogue and putting it into WHITE's hands*). I intend to have some of these lilies in the garden next year. They make such a pretty variety with the aquilegias.

WHITE. Yes.

MRS. MOXON. I must have some peonies, too. I don't know whether to have Modesty or Rosea Plenissima Superba.

(WHITE *clears his throat to attract DREW's attention*.

MRS. MOXON, *busy with the catalogue, does not notice*.)

WHITE. I should have them both.

DREW (*whose back is towards WHITE, says to MISS MILLS*). Eh ?

MISS MILLS. It's only Mr. White. (*Bows and smiles pleasantly to WHITE, then says to DREW*.) I do wish I could get Martha to smarten up a bit. I'm always at her about her clothes.

(WHITE *goes to MRS. MOXON*.)

DREW. Is Martha Mrs. Moxon ?

MISS MILLS (*laughing*). Of course.

DREW. And what are you ?

MISS MILLS. My name is Isolda.

DREW (*pretending to be impressed*). Isolda !

MISS MILLS. My friends call me Izzy.

(DREW *laughs*. MISS MILLS *laughs, too*. MRS. MOXON *replaces the catalogue on the table by the window, then sits by the fireplace. At the same time WHITE approaches DREW, touches him on the shoulder. DREW turns to him*.)

WHITE (*aside to DREW*). This is Mrs. Moxon. (*Indicates MRS. MOXON with his head*.) Not this. (*Indicates MISS MILLS*.)

DREW. I know, I know—this is Izzy.

WHITE. Oh, I say ! (*Rejoins MRS. MOXON*.)

MISS MILLS (*delighted*). You mustn't call me Izzy. You'll shock Martha. I often shock her.

DREW. Do you ?

MISS MILLS. Sometimes I put on one of Mr. Moxon's hats and pretend I'm a man.

DREW. How wild !

MISS MILLS. That's me all over ; you don't half know me yet.

(WHITE comes down and touches DREW on the shoulder as before. DREW turns to him.)

DREW. No, I don't think I do.

WHITE. I thought you wanted to make an impression on Mrs. Moxon.

DREW (aside to WHITE). It is always a good plan to begin by turning your back. (Turns to MISS MILLS, and talks to her across table.)

WHITE (watching them). It's too bad ! (Turns to MRS. MOXON and says abruptly.) We must go.

MRS. MOXON (comes down to WHITE, apparently relieved that they should leave). Must you ? Good-bye. (Shakes hands with WHITE.)

WHITE (turning to DREW, calls). Hal ! (DREW and MISS MILLS are conversing in undertone, and take no notice. Calls again). Hal !

DREW (turning to WHITE). Eh ?

WHITE. It's time we went.

(DREW remains seated. MISS MILLS springs up.)

MISS MILLS (rises). Oh ! Well, I'm going to the Fishers', so I'll walk with you.

MRS. MOXON (innocently). You went to the Fishers' this morning.

MISS MILLS. Yes, and left my umbrella.

MRS. MOXON. No, dear ; it's in the hall.

(MISS MILLS signs to MRS. MOXON to say no more.)

MISS MILLS (aside to MRS. MOXON). I've made another conquest.

MRS. MOXON. Oh, Izzy dear ! (Glances at DREW.) I don't think he is quite nice.

(MISS MILLS laughs airily and crosses to the door.)

MISS MILLS (at door, calling). Captain Drew !

DREW (carelessly, as he turns over a book at table). You two shooe off. I'm going to stay and talk to Mrs. Moxon.

(MRS. MOXON glances uneasily at DREW, who is not looking at her, then at MISS MILLS.)

MISS MILLS (momentarily huffy). Oh. (Smiles as she crosses to MRS. MOXON and says aside to her.) I expect he wants to ask you all about me. Come along, Mr. White, I suppose I must put up with you.

WHITE. Oh, I say.

MISS MILLS. And don't choose a path where I am always having to climb stiles.

(MISS MILLS goes out, followed by WHITE. MRS. MOXON sits rigidly on round seat looking very uneasy. She speaks when DREW lays down the book and looks towards her.)

MRS. MOXON. I don't know that there is much to tell. Her mother was at school with my aunt, so that would make her about twenty-six. She's a nice girl, or rather young woman. She is not nearly so nonsensical as she seems.

DREW (*puzzled*). Who ?

MRS. MOXON. Miss Mills.

DREW. Mills, Mills, Mills—oh, Izzy !

MRS. MOXON (*weakly*). I thought perhaps you admired her.

DREW (*crosses to MRS. MOXON*). I prefer—married women.

MRS. MOXON (*embarrassed*). Oh !

DREW. There's more to talk about. I mean marriage always improves women.

MRS. MOXON (*softening*). I think perhaps you are right.

DREW. It's so unfortunate that it never improves men.

MRS. MOXON (*indulgently*). It should do.

DREW. Yes, it should, but it doesn't ! The men who marry unhappily become ill - natured, and those who marry happily are so insufferably self - satisfied. For ideal companionship give me a married woman and a bachelor.

MRS. MOXON (*seriously*). Oh, how shocking. (*Looks away from him uneasily*.)

DREW (*glances at her and says to himself*). Too soon. (*Cheerfully to MRS. MOXON*.) Now, Mrs. Moxon, tell me all about your little boys.

MRS. MOXON (*looks pleased as she turns to him*). Are you fond of children ?

DREW. I adore them. When Ernest White asked me what I'd like to do this afternoon I said, "Take me to see those dear little boys."

MRS. MOXON. Had he told you about them ?

DREW. Oh, yes—all their pranks and their little mischievous ways.

MRS. MOXON (*reprovingly*). They are very good boys.
DREW. Just what Ernest said, "Such good boys."

MRS. MOXON. I'm sorry they are not here.

DREW. Don't send for them. (MRS. MOXON *looks surprised*.) I mean, why disturb them? They'll be having tea in the nursery or playing rounders in the garden.

MRS. MOXON. Oh, no.

DREW. Well, anyway, it's always a pity to bring children into the drawing-room. It makes them so self-conscious, don't you think?

MRS. MOXON. They are away at school.

DREW (*feigning disappointment*). Shan't I see them? Oh, that is too bad! (*Confidentially*.) And how are they getting on at school?

MRS. MOXON. Sydney is top of his class in geography, and we hope Ronald will take the prize for good conduct.

DREW. Oh, what wonderful boys! And which is the most like you? Sydney or Ronald?

MRS. MOXON. I'll show you their portraits, then you can judge for yourself. (*Crosses to the table and takes the album from under it*.)

DREW (*as she does so*). Oh, yes. Do let me see their pictures. (*As she places the album on the table*.) What a nice fat album. (*He sits at the table*.)

MRS. MOXON (*standing beside him and showing him photographs in the album*). These were taken last term. This is Sydney.

DREW (*pointing to another photograph*). And here's Donald.

MRS. MOXON (*correcting him*). Ronald.

DREW. Ronald, to be sure. What very fine boys for their ages.

MRS. MOXON. We consider them small for eight and ten.

DREW. Eight and ten! But you haven't been married ten years! I mean—you must have been married very young.

MRS. MOXON (*simply*). I was twenty-five.

DREW. Now I do like to hear you so frank about your age.

MRS. MOXON. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

DREW. No, but so many women were married at six—

teen. (*Points to another photograph.*) There's Graham on your lap.

MRS. MOXON. No, that's Sydney with the nurse.

DREW (*expressing surprise and looking very closely at the photograph.*) The nurse? What a very pretty girl, such a refined-looking young woman.

MRS. MOXON. Yes, Eliza was a superior girl. We were sorry to part with her.

DREW. So should I have been.

MRS. MOXON. But her mother died of—pleurisy, I think it was—

DREW. Yes, very nice.

MRS. MOXON. And so she had to go and keep house for her father—so—

DREW (*closes the album and returns it to MRS. MOXON to stop her telling him any more about Eliza.*) Thank you. (*They both rise.*)

MRS. MOXON. You have not said which of the boys you consider most like me.

DREW (*standing opposite and opening the album again.*) Oh, no, let me see. (*Looking at her critically.*) I should say Sydney is most like you about the eyes, but Tommy's got your nose.

MRS. MOXON (*taking the album, says quietly.*) Their names are Sydney and Ronald.

DREW (*sentimentally, while they both hold the album.*) Sydney and Ronald, I never forget. You must feel lonely without them.

MRS. MOXON (*wistfully*). A little.

DREW. You need a companion.

MRS. MOXON. I should dearly like to have one. (*He leans a little towards her, and she looks at him.*) But Mr. Moxon says he can't afford her salary. (*She replaces the album under the table. Drew laughs and turns it into a cough.* MRS. MOXON looks at him innocently and kindly.) You have a cough?

DREW (*coughing and hitting his chest.*) It's one of those dreadful hyena coughs—sounds like laughing. I often have it.

MRS. MOXON. You must take care of yourself.

DREW (*sentimentally*). I need some one to take care of me.

MRS. MOXON (*in a matter-of-fact manner*). We have a

very good practitioner in the village—Mr. Bush, 1, Victoria Polygon.

DREW (*cheerfully crossing the room*). Now, Mrs. Moxon, I want you to make yourself quite at home.

MRS. MOXON (*in mild surprise*). I am at home.

DREW. Of course. I mean just go on as if I wasn't here. Where's your work-basket?

MRS. MOXON (*unconsciously pleased to be ordered about*). Must I get it?

DREW (*seeing the work-basket*). Ah, there it is. (*He goes and gets it as he speaks*.) Woolwork, of course; I knew you'd do woolwork. (*Seeing her bring a chair, he goes to her assistance*.) Oh, is this for me?

MRS. MOXON (*placing the chair to the left of the round seat*). No, I was going to place my skein over the back of it. (*Taking a skein of red wool from basket and preparing to place it over back of chair*.) So.

DREW (*taking skein from her*). No, no. I'll hold; you—
you wind.

MRS. MOXON (*hesitating*). Oh, but—

DREW (*pointing to the round seat*). You sit—there—in the bows—I'll take the stern. (*Sits on the chair opposite to her*.)

MRS. MOXON (*reluctantly sitting*). Oh, very well.

DREW (*cheerfully*). Not at all. Very kind of you to ask me to help you. (*Places skein over his hands and holds them towards her*.)

MRS. MOXON. But I—thank you. (*Undoes the end of the skein and begins to wind*.) Do you mind not holding your hands quite so stiff, please?

DREW. Will you arrange them the way you'd like them?

MRS. MOXON. More so. (*Poises her hands in the position she wants his*.)

DREW. Oh, yes. I remember. It's all coming back to me now. More of a roll. (*Swings his hands up and down as one does in winding wool, but exaggerates the action*.)

(MRS. MOXON *laughs and slaps his hand. She is immediately overcome with confusion*.)

MRS. MOXON. Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to take such a liberty. I am ashamed.

DREW (*confidentially*). Never mind. I won't tell. (MRS. MOXON *glances shyly at him and begins to wind*.)

After a moment's pause while they wind he says.) Any one would take us for two old friends.

MRS. MOXON (*stops winding and says anxiously*). Perhaps we oughtn't to.

DREW. It's too late to stop now. We're both so tangled up in this wool.

MRS. MOXON (*reflecting*). Yes. (*After a moment's pause she says innocently*). And the others are out. (*Continues winding wool quite satisfied. He smiles and watches her before he says*.)

DREW. You know, Mrs. Moxon, I don't think you are half appreciated here.

MRS. MOXON (*pleasantly*). How so?

DREW. You ought to be bounding along on the ocean instead of lying up in dry dock.

MRS. MOXON (*puzzled*). What?

DREW. How shall I put it? You could easily outshine Miss Mills.

MRS. MOXON (*faintly smiling*). Poor Izzy! She wouldn't like that. (*Gravely.*) I think a woman should be content with her home. (*Winds wool rigidly*.)

DREW. Home thinks more of us if we shine outside.

MRS. MOXON (*stops winding and says pensively*). I wonder.

DREW. Make sure. (*She looks askance at him*). Try it.

MRS. MOXON. How?

DREW. Let some one—me, for instance—pretend, only pretend, a great admiration for you.

MRS. MOXON (*assenting*). Yes.

(*He moves a little nearer to her*.)

DREW. And you must pretend—only pretend—an extraordinary interest in me.

MRS. MOXON. Oh, no. I'm sure I could never carry it off, besides it would be very wrong.

DREW (*meaningly*). Then don't let us pretend. (*She looks askance at him*.) My admiration shall be real.

MRS. MOXON (*a little distressed, interrupts him*). I can't help feeling that this is all very worldly and frivolous talk. It rather frightens me.

DREW (*kindly*). Then let us go on winding wool.

MRS. MOXON (*hesitates a moment, then smiles gratefully at him*). Thank you. (*Continues winding*.) I hope you won't think me foolish.

DREW (*reassuringly*). No, dear lady.

MRS. MOXON. It is only that what you were saying in fun reminds me of an incident I have been trying for years to forget.

DREW. I suppose we all have some past incidents we should like to forget.

MRS. MOXON (*stops winding and says quickly*). I was not to blame.

DREW. It was *his* fault.

MRS. MOXON. Entirely. I had no idea he meant anything, until he—he began to— (*Stops and smiles in an embarrassed manner*.)

DREW. Did he really?

MRS. MOXON. I had to beg him to desist. Oh, I was very much put out. Of course, it happened years ago, but whenever I see him I can't help feeling that he still bears me ill-will. (*Meets DREW's eyes, and becomes disconcerted*.) But I've no business to be telling you all this. (*Winds the wool*.)

DREW. Have you ever told any one before?

MRS. MOXON. Never. You see, I couldn't tell my husband. He would think it was *my* fault. (*Looking away from him*.) I can't think how I came to tell *you*.

DREW (*smiling and looking at her*). I think it was very friendly of you to tell me one of your secrets.

MRS. MOXON (*embarrassed*). I—I think we've wound enough wool for to-day.

DREW. So do I. Let's get rid of this gear and have a nice talk. (*Takes the ball of wool from her and rolls it up with the skein, and tosses it all to the ground*.)

MRS. MOXON (*forgetting everything but the fate of her wool, springs up and cries*). Oh, my wool! My wool! (*Hastens to recover it*.)

DREW. I'm awfully sorry—really—do let me help you.

MRS. MOXON (*as she crosses in front of him to the table with the tangled skein in her hands*). You'll only make it worse. (*She spreads the skein on the table and says reproachfully*.) You have made a mess of it. (*She undoes the tangle during the following dialogue*.)

DREW. I can see I shall need a lot more lessons in wool-winding. When may I come and have the next?

MRS. MOXON. I'm afraid I haven't often any time to waste like this.

DREW. What else is there to do in the country?

MRS. MOXON. Oh, a great deal. I have my house-keeping and my rose-garden, and the hens.

DREW. I'm awfully keen on all kinds of garden producee. We might potter round together.

MRS. MOXON. But generally I have calls to pay, and every Monday afternoon there is the Dorcas Meeting, and once a fortnight we have our literary society. Several of us ladies meet at each other's houses and read a play by Shakespeare.

(DREW turns away, smiling to himself.)

DREW (to himself). Poor things!

MRS. MOXON. We took "King Lear" last time. (Looks up at him.) So you see my time is very fully oecupied.

DREW. That is the tragedy of the naval officer. Everybody's life is full when he comes home. I hoped you would let me come and talk to you sometimes. It would do me so much good. But, of course, you are too busy with Doreas and "King Lear."

(MRS. MOXON looks sympathetically at him during this speech. When he has finished speaking she approaches him slowly. He does not look at her, but smiles as she comes near.)

MRS. MOXON (simply). I'm not busy quite all the time.

(Enter MR. MOXON taking off his gloves.)

MOXON. I whistled. (Puts his hat on the cabinet.)

MRS. MOXON (going towards MOXON, appears deeply concerned). Oh, George, I am sorry.

DREW (puzzled). Whistled!

MRS. MOXON (to DREW). He always whistles when he comes from the works (DREW smiles) ever since we were married, and this is the first time I have not heard him.

MOXON. I've just seen Hassell. He's coming here directly.

MRS. MOXON (turns quickly to her husband, expressing surprise and disapproval as she says). Oh! (Taking a chair to the table.)

MOXON. He asked if Miss Mills would be at home. Of course, I don't know—he didn't tell me—but I make a bet that he wants to propose to her.

MRS. MOXON (with emphasis—showing concern). Chester Hassell wants to propose to Izzy!

DREW (*turns to MR. and MRS. MOXON*). Did you say Chester Hassell?

MOXON. Yes—do you know him?

DREW (*pointedly*). I did know him.

MRS. MOXON (*watching DREW*). I don't like him either.

MOXON. Well, my dear, he's coming to propose to Miss Mills—not you. (*Looking out at the window*.) Oh, there she is, coming across the lawn with Ernest White. I'd better warn her. (*Crosses to window and beckons*.)

MRS. MOXON (*glances at MOXON's back before she approaches DREW and says aside to him, anxiously*). It must not be allowed. He's a dreadful man. (*Dropping her voice*.) He is that man I was telling you about.

DREW (*gravely*). By Jove! Was that Hassell? Does Miss Mills care for him?

MRS. MOXON. I don't know.

DREW. Has she encouraged him?

MRS. MOXON. Izzy encourages everybody.

(MOXON leaves the window and returns to the others.)

DREW (*to himself*). Poor old Ernest! (*To MRS. MOXON*.) Anyhow, we must stop her marrying Hassell.

MRS. MOXON. Indeed, yes. Do help me.

(MRS. MOXON moves away from DREW and takes the basket containing the wool up to the table as MISS MILLS enters through the window.)

MISS MILLS. Do you want me?

MOXON (*winking at others*). Watch her blush. (*To MISS MILLS*.) I've got a piece of news for you, young lady. Chester Hassell is coming here this afternoon—to see you.

MISS MILLS (*smiling as she crosses to the table and sits*). I know what for. Whenever I go to the Fishers' he always turns up. It's quite a joke between Lucy Fisher and me.

DREW (*to MOXON*). Do you know this man—Hassell—very well?

MOXON. I can't say we are intimate, but we are neighbourly. He's quite a nice fellow.

MRS. MOXON. I don't agree with you.

MOXON (*impatiently*). You are so hard to please.

DREW. Has Hassell lived here long?

MOXON. Oh, yes, he was here before we came. His mother had a little house on the other side of the village. He lived there with her till she died.

MISS MILLS. He went into lodgings after the sale.

DREW. What does he do?

MOXON. Lives on what his mother left him. I don't suppose it was much. He is the treasurer of our little club here.

DREW. Oh, yes. And don't you find that your little club is generally in debt?

MOXON (*innocently*). Do you know—that's a strange thing. We are always in debt.

MISS MILLS. Mr. Moxon doesn't know what you mean, but *I* do.

MOXON. I know nothing against Hassell, and I prefer to take a charitable view of people.

MISS MILLS (*thoughtfully*). He's rather handsome.

MRS. MOXON (*earnestly*). Oh. He's not a *nice* man.

MOXON (*coming down on MRS. MOXON, turning impatiently to her*). What do *you* know against him?

MRS. MOXON (*turns to him*). He *drinks*.

MOXON. How do you know?

MRS. MOXON. The Fishers' cook told our cook.

MOXON. I'm surprised you gossip with the cook.

MISS MILLS. One must treat the servants as equals nowadays—to keep them in their places.

DREW. I know Hassell used to be foxed a good deal of the time when he was in the service.

MISS MILLS. Oh, yes—I remember now. We heard he was in the Navy.

DREW (*deliberately*). He was.

MOXON. Perhaps you know more about him than we do.

DREW. Possibly.

MISS MILLS. I can see he did something. Do tell us what it was.

DREW. I'd rather not. (*Hesitatingly*.) Unless you seriously think of—

MISS MILLS (*airily*). Oh, you needn't be afraid that I shall marry the creature.

DREW. Then there's no need for me to tell you anything. I only thought—if you cared for him—it might be my duty to warn you, especially as Ernest told me you are an heiress.

MISS MILLS (*smiling*). Yes.

MOXON. She's only got six thousand pounds.

MISS MILLS (*annoyed*). That's an heiress.

MRS. MOXON I don't think I should call that an heiress, dear ; I shouldn't call anything less than ten thousand pounds an heiress.

DREW. Anyway, Miss Mills says she is not going to accept him—so that settles it. We needn't discuss him. (*Goes up for his hat.*) I'm sure I don't want to do him any harm, and I certainly don't want to meet him—so I'll go and find Ernest in the garden. (*Goes to the window calling.*) Ernest ! Ernest ! (*He goes in search of WHITE.*)

MISS MILLS (*smiling*). It is quite evident that Captain Drew doesn't wish me to marry Mr. Hassell.

MOXON. That's probably at the bottom of it all. Some old rivalry, no doubt. And if White told him you are an heiress ! Who knows ? He may have designs on you himself.

MRS. MOXON. I don't think *that* is charitable.

MISS MILLS. It's possible.

MOXON (*to MISS MILLS*). Certainly it is. (*To MRS. MOXON*). It is *you* who are not charitable. I don't like the way you attack Hassell, for no reason at all. It is likely to do him an injury, and if it was traced back it might be very uncomfortable for us. I shall certainly go out of my way to be agreeable to Hassell the next time I meet him. I shall make a point of showing him that *I*, the head of the house, am quite willing to be friendly. Yes, I shall.

(*He goes out.*)

MISS MILLS. He *can* be exasperating.

MRS. MOXON (*irritated*). Oh, yes. He is—(*pauses, says quietly*)—he is my husband.

MISS MILLS. I *should* like to know what Mr. Hassell did, shouldn't you, Martha ?

MRS. MOXON. No, dear, I think Captain Drew is right.

MISS MILLS (*a little surprised*). You said *he* wasn't quite nice just now.

MRS. MOXON. I find I misjudged him. Whatever this scandal is, it does not affect us. You need not even see Mr. Hassell when he calls.

MISS MILLS. I think I'd better see him.

MRS. MOXON. It is not necessary, and it would only embarrass you both.

MISS MILLS. I think I'd better see him.

MRS. MOXON. But you don't intend to accept him?

MISS MILLS. No.

MRS. MOXON. Then why see him? (MISS MILLS *does not reply.*) It can't be that you wish him to propose in order that you may refuse him!

MISS MILLS (*looks extremely disconcerted, then says indignantly.*) No, I don't know how you can suggest such a thing, Martha.

(Enter MAIDSERVANT.)

MAID. Mr. Chester Hassell to see Miss Mills.

MISS MILLS. I will see Mr. Hassell.

(MAID *goes out.*)

MRS. MOXON (*reproachfully.*) Izzy!

MISS MILLS. You are not going to stay in the room, are you?

MRS. MOXON. You must do as you wish.

(MRS. MOXON *withdraws through the window.* MISS MILLS *rises and prinks herself a little before the glass, comes down to table, takes a rose with a long stem from the vase, sits in a chair, arranges her dress effectively, and toys with the rose.* Enter MAIDSERVANT.)

MAID. Mr. Chester Hassell.

(Enter CHESTER HASSELL. *He is a dissipated, but fine-looking man, about thirty-five, well dressed.* MAID *goes out.*)

HASSELL (*going to shake hands with MISS MILLS, who remains seated.*) This is fortunate—to find you alone.

MISS MILLS (*smiling.*) Oh, thank you.

HASSELL (*crossing to the other side of the table.*) May I sit here?

MISS MILLS. Do.

HASSELL. I daresay you can guess what I have come to ask you.

MISS MILLS. No. (*Smells her rose.*)

HASSELL (*sits opposite MISS MILLS before he says.*) I am going abroad.

MISS MILLS (*disappointed.*) Oh! have you only come to say good-bye?

HASSELL. I hope not. (MISS MILLS *drops her eyes.*) I find it necessary to go abroad.

MISS MILLS (*glancing up suspiciously.*) Necessary?

HASSELL (*quickly*). For my health.

MISS MILLS. I see.

HASSELL. We have met fairly often lately.

MISS MILLS (*sentimentally*). Yes.

HASSELL. On the several occasions that I have met you at Mrs. Fisher's you have been more than kind. I have been led to hope—

MISS MILLS (*rises, affecting maidenly confusion*). Oh, Mr. Hassell!

HASSELL (*rising*). I should have spoken sooner, but for one thing. I heard you were rich. I do not know whether you have the control of your fortune or not. (*He pauses a moment. MISS MILLS tears the petals from her rose and scatters them on the floor.*) I say I do not know.

MISS MILLS. Pa left it to me to do as I like with. (*Suspiciously.*) But why? Would it have made any difference?

HASSELL. Not the least. Rich or poor, I love you madly. (*He comes towards her. She puts out her hand to restrain him.*)

MISS MILLS (*sentimentally*). I cannot love you.

HASSELL (*disconcerted*). What! But you were so encouraging.

MISS MILLS. I didn't wish to seem unkind.

HASSELL (*sneeringly*). That was very considerate of you, but the alternative was not to flirt as outrageously as you have done.

MISS MILLS (*dropping the sentimental pose and becoming indignant*). Oh! That's very rude!

HASSELL (*comes to her*). You know, you can't lead a man on till he makes an ass of himself, and then walk away, saying you don't love him, without giving a reason.

MISS MILLS. Yes, I can if I want to.

HASSELL. You have often gone out of your way to meet me.

MISS MILLS (*indignantly*). Oh!

HASSELL. The first time I met you at the Fishers', you hung about till every one had gone, and asked me to see you home. And as you left me at the gate you told me when you'd be at the Fishers' again.

MISS MILLS (*pointing to the door*). Leave the room!

HASSELL. It's not losing you I mind so much. It's the waste of time.

MISS MILLS (*indignantly*). Oh ! I believe all the things I've heard about you now.

HASSELL. What things ?

MISS MILLS. Never mind.

HASSELL (*going towards her*). Who has told you anything against me ?

MISS MILLS. People.

HASSELL (*seizing her wrist*). What people ?

MISS MILLS. Take your hand away.

HASSELL. Not until you tell me what people.

MISS MILLS. Mrs. Moxon.

HASSELL (*releases her, and says scornfully*). That saint !

MISS MILLS. It's very ill-bred of you to call her names while you are in her drawing-room. (*As HASSELL goes to the door*.) She is not the only one either.

HASSELL (*turning quickly to her from the doorway*). Who else ?

MISS MILLS. Captain Drew.

HASSELL (*alarmed*). Drew ?

MISS MILLS. Of the Royal Navy.

HASSELL (*recovering himself*). All right. Let me ever catch Captain Drew in a peccadillo, or Mrs. Moxon either. It will be the worse for them.

(*He hurries off*.)

MISS MILLS (*goes quickly to the door, nearly crying*). He's no gentleman.

(*Enter MRS. MOXON through the window*.)

MRS. MOXON. How loudly you were talking.

MISS MILLS. He's been so rude.

MRS. MOXON. What did he say ?

MISS MILLS. Don't ask me. I'm throbbing all over.

MRS. MOXON (*pointing to rose stem which MISS MILLS still holds*). What are you doing with that rose stalk ?

MISS MILLS. Nothing. (*Throws rose stem on floor and stamps on it, then crosses to the door. Speaks at door*.) I'm going upstairs to have a good cry. (*Goes out, comes back again, and, before finally withdrawing, adds*.) Martha—he did propose.

(*MRS. MOXON picks up rose stem, turns and sees the rose petals MISS MILLS has dropped. She stoops down and gathers them up. Enter CAPTAIN*

DREW *through the window. Drops his hat on a chair.*)

DREW. Housekeeping?

MRS. MOXON (*serious and worried*). Yes. I do so dislike messes. (*Throws rose leaves in wastepaper-basket beside the fire. DREW goes towards her.*)

DREW. I must go now. (*Holding out his hand says tenderly.*) Good-bye.

MRS. MOXON. Good-bye. (*She allows him to retain her hand as she says.*) If it really does you any good to talk to me, do come again.

DREW. Thanks, dear lady, I will.

(Enter ERNEST WHITE *through the window. DREW's back is towards the window, so he does not see WHITE. MRS. MOXON sees him, however, and withdraws her hand.*)

MRS. MOXON (*embarrassed*). I will tell my husband you are leaving. (*Goes out quickly.*)

WHITE (*watches her off, then turns to DREW*). I say (*going towards DREW*) she's not going to let you make love to her, is she?

DREW. You never know, but one thing is certain.

WHITE. What?

DREW. I'm falling in love with *her*.

WHITE. What!

DREW. She's so quaint and funny and touching. Oh, she's charming!

WHITE (*anxiously*). But what will be the end of it?

DREW. Never mind the end. This is only the beginning. Never look ahead, man—never look ahead.

(*They go out.*)

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE.—*The same as Act I. It is a month later, a summer evening after dinner. The lamps are lighted. There is a bowl of flowers on the table.*

(Enter MRS. MOXON, followed by MISS MILLS. They both wear dinner dress. There is a great change in MRS. MOXON'S appearance. She is charmingly dressed, and wears her hair becomingly. She wears some red roses in her dress.)

MISS MILLS (*as she closes the door*). I'm so glad to see you have taken my advice about dressing better. (*Sits on the ottoman.*)

MRS. MOXON (*a little anxiously, turning to MISS MILLS*). I hope you don't think I am trying to look too young.

MISS MILLS. Oh, no ! Married women dress just like girls now. I can't think why, because we, of course, dress to please everybody, while you, I suppose, dress only to please your husband.

(MRS. MOXON looks at MISS MILLS, and smells the flowers in the vase before she speaks.)

MRS. MOXON. What a delicious perfume these flowers have !

MISS MILLS. How amusing Captain Drew was at dinner !

MRS. MOXON (*smiling*). He is always so merry.

MISS MILLS. I'm surprised he gets on so slowly with women. (MRS. MOXON looks towards MISS MILLS.) He has been coming to the house nearly every day for a month, and I don't feel as if I knew him any better than I did at first. (MRS. MOXON looks away.) He is always so respectful.

MRS. MOXON. We should not care to be so friendly with him if he were not.

MISS MILLS. It amuses me so the way he always pretends that he comes to see *you*.

MRS. MOXON. It is quite appropriate that he should ask for me when he calls.

MISS MILLS. Oh, quite, and I think he likes you; but we all know why he comes so often—don't we, dear?

MRS. MOXON (*a little anxiously*). Did he ever tell you he comes to see you?

MISS MILLS. Oh, no, he never told me, but a woman always knows. (*Men's voices heard outside*, MISS MILLS smiles.) Here they are. (*Rises, goes to the window*.)

(Enter CAPTAIN DREW, ERNEST WHITE, and MR. MOXON. *They all wear dinner clothes*. DREW goes straight to MRS. MOXON, and WHITE joins MISS MILLS.)

DREW (*aside* to MRS. MOXON). How well that gown becomes you.

MRS. MOXON (*pleased and nervous*). I'm so glad you like it. (*Crosses in front of DREW to MR. MOXON, drawing a letter from her pocket*.) I had a letter from Ronald before dinner. (*DREW moves away*.)

MOXON. Oh, well, I suppose there's no need to read it just now. I'm going outside to smoke.

MRS. MOXON. Shall I come out and read it to you?

MOXON. Give a fellow time to digest his dinner.

MRS. MOXON. Yes, George, there's no hurry. I only thought you might like news of the boys.

MOXON. By and by; I suppose they are all right?

MRS. MOXON. Oh, yes, they are quite well. (*Reads the letter to herself, smiling affectionately as she sits on the ottoman seat*.)

MOXON (*addressing DREW and WHITE*). What do you say to a smoke on the terrace?

WHITE. Thank you. A cigarette in the moonlight. Miss Mills—

(*Goes out with MR. MOXON through the window*.)

MISS MILLS. Yes, I'll come, too. Captain Drew, we are all going out to smoke.

DREW. Are we? (*MISS MILLS follows the others out through the window*. DREW watches MRS. MOXON as she reads letter.) And what has Ronald got to say?

MRS. MOXON. Would you like to read it?

DREW (*smiling kindly*). No, I should like to hear you read it.

MRS. MOXON (*reading*). "My dear Mamma,—I hope you are quite well. I am quite well. Sydney is quite well. We played cricket yesterday. I made two runs and Sydney made six runs. Palmer made a duck. I was very glad, 'cos he hit me one day once, but I did not cry. Love to papa. Your loving little son, Ronald."

DREW (*smiling*). Funny little chap !

MRS. MOXON (*showing letter to Drew*). Doesn't he write well for eight ?

DREW (*looking at letter as he sits beside her*). Splendid !

MRS. MOXON. It's too bad of me to make you listen to the boys' letters.

DREW (*cheerfully and kindly*). I always want to hear how Sydney and Ronald are getting on.

MRS. MOXON (*smiles gratefully*). That is so kind of you.

DREW. Lucky little lads to have such a mother.

MRS. MOXON (*wistfully*). They will soon be able to do without me. The first break comes when they go to school. Before that I used to do everything for them. (*Smiling.*) Tuck them up in bed, make them get up in the morning, teach them their letters, and play "I spy" in the garden. (*Sighing.*) But already they can do so many things without me.

DREW (*sympathetically*). They soon learn to fly by themselves, don't they ?

MRS. MOXON. Boys do. One keeps girls longer.

DREW. You'd have liked a little girl ?

MRS. MOXON (*sadly*). I had a little girl—once. She died. (*Smiles at him through her tears.*) There—there. We must make up our minds to bear the things we can't help, and the boys will soon be home for their midsummer holidays.

DREW (*with a touch of regret*). When the boys come home I expect you won't have much time for me.

MRS. MOXON (*kindly*). I think I shall still be able to squeeze out a little time for you.

DREW (*seriously*). You won't *quite* forget me when I go back to sea ?

MRS. MOXON (*simply*). I shall never forget you. (A little *anxiously*.) But you are not going away yet ?

DREW. I've had no orders. (*Rises.*) Don't let us

think about that. I'm so happy here, I want to forget I ever have to go away. What shall we do to-morrow?

MRS. MOXON. In the morning we must stake up the lilies and take cuttings from the picotees—that is, if you can spare the time.

DREW (*comes to her*). I wish that I had something really important to do to-morrow morning.

MRS. MOXON (*smiling*). So that you would have an excuse?

DREW. No, so that I could give it up to come and garden with *you*.

MRS. MOXON (*smiling*). Oh!

DREW. What shall we do in the afternoon?

MRS. MOXON. To-morrow is my day at home.

DREW (*disappointed*). Oh!

MRS. MOXON. Perhaps no one will come.

DREW. I don't suppose any one will.

MRS. MOXON. Sometimes I have as many as *six* ladies in my drawing-room at one time.

DREW. Let them amuse each other, and come for a walk in the woods with me.

MRS. MOXON (*smiling doubtfully*). Oh, I don't know.

DREW. You will?

MRS. MOXON (*gravely*). Unless my husband requires me.

DREW (*slightly embarrassed*). Yes, of course. (*Pauses a moment before he says*.) In that case we must go the next day.

MRS. MOXON (*cheerfully*). Very well. (*Looks at him, he is smiling*.) Why do you smile?

DREW. I don't know. I was thinking—how wrong our first impressions often are.

MRS. MOXON. Yes. Do you know, I didn't approve of you at first.

DREW. You mean you do now?

MRS. MOXON (*simply*). I think you know whether I do or not.

DREW (*smiling thoughtfully*). That first day.

MRS. MOXON. That day we wound the wool.

DREW. And you said I might come and see you sometimes, if it would do me any good. (*Sits on ottoman*.) I can't tell you what good it has done me to know you.

MRS. MOXON (*in a quiet ecstasy*). I'm so glad, for you have done so much for me. You'll never know how much.

DREW (*leans towards her and takes her hand*). There is nothing I would not do for you.

MRS. MOXON (*looks gratefully at him, then becomes timid, rises, withdrawing her hand*). You had better join the others now.

DREW. Are you coming ?

MRS. MOXON. Presently. I am going upstairs for my cloud. (*Turns to door.*)

DREW. Don't leave me yet.

MRS. MOXON (*turns to him and asks innocently*). Why ?

DREW (*embarrassed*). I mean—please give me a rose.

MRS. MOXON (*smiling*). Willingly.

(*Takes a rose from her dress and gives it to him.*

He encloses her hand and the rose in both his hands and looks at her intently. She looks at him, first wondering, then timid, withdraws her hand, leaving the rose in his, then turns to door.)

DREW. I'll wait for you here.

MRS. MOXON (*at door, just going, says nervously*). No, don't wait for me.

(*DREW smiles after her as she disappears, and puts the rose in his coat. Enter MISS MILLS through the window. She appears irresolute.*)

MISS MILLS. It's a little chilly out of doors.

DREW. Have you come in to get a wrap ?

MISS MILLS. I'm not sure. Do you ever suffer from melancholia ?

DREW (*carelessly*). Sometimes.

MISS MILLS (*sighing*). So do I. (*Sits down forlornly.*) I have it now.

DREW (*cheerfully*). You ought not to know anything of melancholia yet.

MISS MILLS. I know the world thinks I am blithe as a bird—singing from morn till eve—but if they only knew ! I am often very, very unhappy.

DREW. What do you ever want that you don't have ?

MISS MILLS. The trouble is so often, I don't know what I want.

DREW (*kindly*). Then, depend upon it, you want loving.

MISS MILLS (*thoughtfully*). I daresay that's it.

DREW (*kindly*). He'll come along some day.

MISS MILLS (*a little piqued*). It's not for want of chances that I'm not engaged.

DREW. Never been in love ?

MISS MILLS (*thoughtfully*). I can't be sure how much one ought to be in love—to be in love.

DREW. Then you never have.

MISS MILLS. Not properly. (*Rises.*) And yet I feel if some strong man strode up and said "You shall!" I might.

DREW (*turns to her*). He's too timid. Never tells you straight what he means—isn't that it ?

MISS MILLS (*in a panic*). Oh, I don't know. Don't ask me. One has to be so careful not to let one's feelings run away with one if one has money.

DREW. Oh, the six thousand pounds.

MISS MILLS (*haughtily*). Six thousand pounds is not a pittance.

DREW. But he wouldn't want to marry you for *that*.

MISS MILLS. You don't seem to recognise the difficulty of my position. If a girl is pretty and penniless she knows she is being wooed for herself, and if she is rich and plain she knows it must be for her money—but with me—it might so well be either.

DREW (*laughing*). But what's-his-name is very well off.

Miss Mills (*interested*). Oh, is he ? I didn't know that.

DREW. And a good fellow from stem to stern.

MISS MILLS. Nothing like having a good opinion of yourself.

DREW. *He* didn't say it, *I* say it. And I'll say more, I'll say—(*enter ERNEST WHITE.*) Oh, now, speak of the devil—

(DREW laughs and disappears as he speaks, while

MISS MILLS turns and sees ERNEST WHITE.)

MISS MILLS. Is there madness in your family ?

WHITE (*taken aback*). My dear Miss Mills ! (*Comes to her.*)

MISS MILLS. Your cousin has just been behaving so strangely.

WHITE. Has he been making love to you ?

MISS MILLS. Anything but. (*Sits on ottoman.*)

WHITE. Of course, I'm very fond of Hal, but I don't think the Navy is good to marry into.

MISS MILLS. I don't think it's quite safe, but it must be very nice to have a husband who keeps going away on voyages and coming home for honeymoons.

WHITE (*sits beside her*). But how much nicer a perpetual honeymoon in a snug little cottage—like mine.

MISS MILLS (*not noticing his speech*). Officers' wives can get to very good parties.

WHITE. No better than I can.

MISS MILLS. I do so like those buttons they wear.

WHITE (*annoyed*). It's no use hankering after Hal's buttons. He's a hopeless case at present.

MISS MILLS (*dismayed*). Has he got a wife ?

WHITE. No, no, but—(*rises*) it's a very delicate matter to speak of. (*Looks off from window to make sure he is not overheard, then turns to MISS MILLS.*) I suppose you can see why he comes to this house so often ?

MISS MILLS (*coyly*). I suppose I can.

WHITE (*exasperated, goes towards her*). Oh, you are off on a wrong scent altogether. He doesn't come to see *you*.

MISS MILLS (*taken aback*). Eh ? (*Recovering herself.*) I never supposed he did. I don't see why you think you need tell me that. As if I ever suggested he comes to see *me*.

WHITE (*glances towards window before he lowers his voice to say*). He comes to see Mrs. Moxon.

MISS MILLS (*after a moment's panic, says coldly*). Of course, I saw that.

WHITE. I'm not saying a word against Mrs. Moxon. I am sure she is all she should be, and even more.

MISS MILLS. Oh, those quiet women !

WHITE (*distractedly, coming back to her*). It puts me in such a position. I introduced him.

MISS MILLS (*rises*). I wonder if her husband knows ?

WHITE (*irritated*). He'd be the last to see, the great dull thing !

MISS MILLS. I wonder if she knows herself ?

WHITE. Of course she does. Haven't you noticed the change ? The last month has transformed her.

MISS MILLS. Oh ! I begin to see it all. Those new clothes. And I thought she was taking my advice.

WHITE. The first day he came—before ever he saw

her—he said he was going to make love to her—just to see if he could. *I* said he couldn't. That set his back up. And this is the result.

MISS MILLS. I wonder if he means it now ?

WHITE. I'm hanged if I know. If he doesn't, we must stop it. And if he does—we *must* stop it.

MISS MILLS (*thoughtfully*). For the present, we must just watch and listen. In a case of this sort, I should even consider it right to intercept letters and listen at keyholes.

WHITE. Oh, I say !

(Enter MRS. MOXON. *She wears a scarf over her shoulders.*)

MRS. MOXON. I thought you were all outside.

WHITE. Mr. Moxon is there.

MRS. MOXON. Oh !

MISS MILLS. And Captain Drew.

MRS. MOXON (*stops*). Oh ! (Takes off her scarf, and lays it on the round seat.)

(MISS MILLS and WHITE exchange meaning glances, unperceived by MRS. MOXON. Enter MR. MOXON.)

MOXON. I must be off now. I'm going to play bridge at the Fishers'.

MRS. MOXON (*turning impulsively to MOXON*). George, please stay at home.

MOXON (*surprised*). Why ? What's the matter ?

MRS. MOXON (*faltering*). Nothing ; but I'd rather you stayed.

MOXON. But they expect me. We arranged the game yesterday.

MRS. MOXON. Couldn't you send them word ?

MOXON. It's too late now. I told Hassell to call for me. He'll be here directly.

MRS. MOXON. Then you can send word by him.

MOXON. But what excuse can I make ? I can't say I'm ill, because he'll be able to see for himself that I'm not.

MRS. MOXON (*thoughtfully*). No, you can't say that. It would be untrue. (*Impulsively*). Wouldn't it be enough to say that your wife begged you to remain ?

MOXON (*laughingly*). They *would* think I was on leading strings.

MRS. MOXON (*earnestly*). Would that matter for once ?

MOXON (*irritated*). Now, don't persist, my dear. I

can't go and break an important engagement because you take a sudden fancy to have me stay at home. (*Amiably.*) I'll stay at home to-morrow.

MRS. MOXON. To-morrow won't do ! (*Turns abruptly to round seat and picks up her scarf.*)

MOXON (*watching her in mild surprise*). Aren't you well, Martha ?

MRS. MOXON (*trying to speak lightly to disguise her agitation*). Oh yes, thank you, I feel particularly well. (*Draws scarf round her shoulders and crosses swiftly towards window.*)

MISS MILLS (*going to MRS. MOXON anxiously*). Are you going out, Martha ?

MRS. MOXON. Yes. (*Pauses in window, says uncertainly.*) No, I don't know. (*Turns and sees them all looking at her.*) Oh, I don't know what I'm going to do. (*Crosses swiftly to the door, throwing her scarf on a chair and then goes out of the room.*)

MISS MILLS (*to MOXON*). You ought to stay.

MOXON. When I want your advice I shall ask for it.

MISS MILLS (*reprovingly*). Please don't forget you are speaking to a guest. Mr. White, you will find Captain Drew on the terrace. (*Picks up MRS. MOXON'S cloud.*)

WHITE (*taking her hint*). Oh, yes, thank you.

(*He goes out.*)

MISS MILLS. What a change there is in Martha !

MOXON (*puzzled*). Change ? What change ?

MISS MILLS. She seems so much younger and brighter.

MOXON. Does she ? I hadn't noticed any difference.

MISS MILLS. Don't you think she looks better ?

MOXON. She always looks about the same.

MISS MILLS. Have you noticed her clothes ?

MOXON. Not particularly.

MISS MILLS (*exasperated*). Then you ought to have done. If she doesn't wear pretty clothes for you, she wears them for some one else.

MOXON (*vaguely*). Who ?

MISS MILLS. Some one doesn't come somewhere for nothing.

MOXON. I don't know what you mean.

MISS MILLS (*as if she were dropping a casual remark*). I should think Captain Drew makes a great many conquests.

MOXON (*pleasantly*). Charming fellow, isn't he?

MISS MILLS. I suppose you've no idea what a temptation it is to some of us—after we've had a few successes—to go flirting about with every one (*pointedly, as she goes towards him*). Single or married.

MOXON (*startled*). Oh! (*Looks at MISS MILLS, then lays his hand kindly on her shoulder*.) My dear young lady, I knew your father well, and I have the greatest respect for your mother—don't try anything of that sort on with me.

MISS MILLS (*starts with surprise, then laughs*). You! I flirt with you! That would be exhilarating—a flirtation with you. Oh, no, thank you, I'd rather be excused.

MOXON. Then do say what you're driving at.

MISS MILLS. It's like teaching any one the A.B.C. Can't you see that Captain Drew and Martha—

MOXON (*taken aback*). What! You mean to suggest he comes here to—(*dismissing the idea*). Oh, it's—it's absurd!

MISS MILLS. It's not at all absurd. Martha looks very nice . . . when she's dressed up.

MOXON. But I thought *you* were the attraction.

MISS MILLS (*sadly*). So did I!

MOXON. If I had any suspicion that my wife—

MISS MILLS (*watching him, rather uneasy at what she has done*). I am sure Martha will never do anything she shouldn't. She may be fond of him, but she has dignity and self-control—and so has he. It's not as if they were two French people. (*MOXON moves impatiently*.) I only told you this to put you on your guard! So that you would stay at home and be nice to her instead of prancing out with that Hassell, whom you've suddenly become so fond of—just out of opposition to all of us. But, of course, you'll take it all wrong and be nastier than ever.

MOXON. I don't believe there's anything in what you say. You've been reading novels. You mustn't come here putting these notions into our heads. I don't like it. I'm afraid you have a nasty mind.

MISS MILLS (*indignantly*). Oh, how unjust! How ungrateful! How like you.

(Enter MAID.)

MAID. Mr. Chester Hassell.

MISS MILLS. Oh—oh !

(MISS MILLS leaves hastily by the window in time to escape CHESTER HASSELL as he enters.
The MAID goes out.)

HASSELL. Are you ready, Moxon ?

MOXON. Good-evening, Hassell. I can't go to the Fishers' with you.

HASSELL. But, my dear Moxon, we can't have a game if you don't come.

MOXON. That's a pity—sit down.

HASSELL (sits). It's so late to cry off now—unless you have some very special reason.

MOXON. I have no reason at all—only my wife asked me to stay with her.

HASSELL. I hope Mrs. Moxon is well !

MOXON. She says she feels particularly well. I don't know what it's all about. I suppose she must have hysteria.

HASSELL. If you can't come I must go and hunt up somebody else.

MOXON (touches HASSELL's arm). One moment. On the other hand, if I stay at home, Miss Mills will think I am taking her advice, so *I will* come to the Fishers' with you.

HASSELL. Good !

MOXON. I'm very much annoyed with Miss Mills.

HASSELL (a little surprised). Oh !

MOXON. Now, Hassell, you know the kind of people we are.

HASSELL. Yes. Why ? Aren't you ?

MOXON. Of course we are. I have no wish to hold my household up as a model. (Puts his thumb in his waistcoat.) But I think I may say it is a very fair example of a well-conducted English home—isn't it ?

HASSELL. Certainly.

MOXON. Well, Miss Mills has had the impertinence to tell me, to my face, that my wife is carrying on a flirtation with—

(MISS MILLS appears at the window.)

MISS MILLS. I didn't. (Both men rise.) I only told you to look out.

HASSELL. Good evening, Miss Mills.

MISS MILLS. Please understand, Mr. Hassell, that you and I are not on speaking terms.

(MISS MILLS *retires*. HASSELL *smiles*, while MOXON *goes up and deliberately closes the window through which she has gone*.)

MOXON. She won't do that again in a hurry. (As he returns to HASSELL MISS MILLS *re-opens the window and disappears*.)

HASSELL (*craftily*). You were saying before we were interrupted—she said your wife was carrying on a flirtation with—(as if trying to remember a name). Who was it?

MOXON. He shall be nameless.

HASSELL. Oh—Captain Drew, wasn't it?

MOXON. Yes. (Looks at HASSELL.) But he shall be nameless. I ought not to have mentioned this to you, but I was so annoyed. To think of any one daring even to hint at such a thing in connection with Mrs. Moxon.

HASSELL. I know how you feel. You had to tell some one to relieve your feelings.

MOXON (*turns to him*). Exactly. I see you understand me.

HASSELL. Perfectly.

MOXON. You won't let this go any further.

HASSELL. Certainly not. You can trust me.

MOXON. Thanks, Hassell. I'm sure you are my friend. (*Offers his hand to HASSELL*.)

HASSELL (*grasping MOXON'S hand*). Indeed I am.

MOXON. And I'm yours.

HASSELL. Thanks. (They withdraw their hands. MOXON turns away.) Oh, by the way—(MOXON turns to HASSELL). I don't like to ask you. Only—some money—I was expecting hasn't turned up. It will, of course—(MOXON nods and shakes HASSELL'S hand) but I wonder if you could help me out meanwhile.

MOXON. I should be delighted—only at present my money is all so tied up. Try Fisher.

HASSELL. I did. His was tied up, too.

MOXON. How unfortunate. Just when you want it, too. (Taking HASSELL'S arm and crossing to the door.) Come along, old fellow, we must be off. And you might win a lot at bridge.

HASSELL. Yes, about 3s. 6d.

MOXON. Well, that's a beginning. Rome wasn't built in a day.

(HASSELL and MOXON go out. *As they do so MISS MILLS peeps cautiously through the window, before advancing into the room and beckoning to ERNEST WHITE to follow her.*)

MISS MILLS. There! You heard everything.

WHITE. That's nothing new. He's always trying to borrow money, only he never pays it back—so no one will lend him any more.

MISS MILLS. I don't mean the money part. But fancy him telling that odious Mr. Hassell, of all people, what we think about Captain Drew and Martha.

WHITE (*vaguely*). Yes.

MISS MILLS. You don't seem to see the gravity of it. Mr. Hassell is the most vindictive creature. He'll make up a scandal about them if he can. He hates them so.

WHITE. Why?

MISS MILLS. Ever since they advised me not to have him.

WHITE (*surprised*). What!

MISS MILLS (*smiling indulgently*). I shouldn't have had him anyway. (*Touching him on the arm.*) I don't like such dark men. (*Seriously—WHITE smiles and strokes his moustache.*) But when I refused him he said if he ever found out anything against Captain Drew or Martha it would be the worse for them. Those were his very words: "It will be the worse for them."

WHITE (*who has not been listening to preceding speech*). I don't think you need have let him propose to you.

MISS MILLS. How was I to prevent it? And then if he didn't go and tell Luey Fisher that I as good as proposed to him. Oh! (*ERNEST WHITE laughs, MISS MILLS turns to him indignantly.*) Mr. White, I'm surprised.

WHITE (*confused*). I beg your pardon.

MISS MILLS (*distantly*). I'm not sure that I shall grant it.

WHITE. Well, now, what are we to do about Mrs. Moxon and Hal?

MISS MILLS. It's all your fault for bringing him here. (*sits R.*)

WHITE. It doesn't help us much to say it's my fault.

MISS MILLS. You made the muddle, so you must get them out.

WHITE. But I don't know how unless you help me.

MISS MILLS. I'm not sure that it would be quite nice for me to interfere. I'm not married.

WHITE. You could be married if you would. (*Coming towards her. Leaning over her, he says sentimentally.*) Izzy !

MISS MILLS. What a tactless opportunity to take. (*Rises.*)

WHITE. Very well, then. You leave everything to me ?

MISS MILLS. Certainly not. You'll only go and make things worse. You must have a serious talk with Captain Drew. Call him in here. You'll be able to watch the workings of his face better by this light.

WHITE (*despondently*). He won't listen to me.

MISS MILLS. You must do your best. I'll go and have a few womanly words with Martha. (*Confidently.*) She'll listen to me. (*Crosses to the door.*) I'm thoroughly worked up over this.

(*She goes out.*)

WHITE (*despondently*). Now for it. Oh dear ! (*Goes to the window and calls.*) Hal ! (*Mrs. MOXON is heard singing Tosti's "Good-bye."* After a short interval *WHITE calls again.*) Hal !

(*Enter CAPTAIN DREW by the window.*)

DREW. Well, what is it ? I say—I've just thought of such a funny yarn. It'll make you scream.

WHITE (*seriously*). I don't wish to scream at present, thank you.

DREW (*hearing the song, motions WHITE to be silent*). Sh—— ! Mrs. Moxon is singing. (*Listens smilingly.*)

WHITE. I want to speak to you.

DREW. Not while she sings. (*WHITE stands with his back to the door, facing DREW. They stand so till the song is finished.*)

DREW. Shall we join them ?

WHITE. Not till I've spoken.

DREW (*amused*). Well, what is it ? Am I to be court-
artialed ?

WHITE. Are you never serious ?

DREW (*cheerfully*). Oh, often, but, fortunately, *you* can always make me laugh.

WHITE. She never used to sing before *you* came.

DREW (*seriously*). Because no one cared to hear her. (*Humorously.*) You'll get lumbago if you stand there. (*He moves towards the window.*)

WHITE. Now, now, now !

(WHITE crosses quickly to window, before which he stands as if to prevent DREW from going out.)

DREW. Oh, don't keep tacking about like that. Sit down and say what you want to. (*Sits down and takes out a cigarette.*)

WHITE. You mayn't smoke in here.

DREW. Yes, I may. I've had special leave.

WHITE. She couldn't bear the smell of smoke before. Now, that shows you.

DREW (*lighting his cigarette*). What does it show me ?

WHITE. I think it's gone far enough.

DREW (*puffs smoke before he says carelessly*). How are you getting on with Izzy ?

WHITE. I'm not going to be put off that way. I think it's time you tell Mrs. Moxon you are not serious.

DREW. I wish you wouldn't be so meddlesome.

WHITE. I must be meddlesome. Consider my responsibilities. I brought you here. When you said you were going to make love to Mrs. Moxon I thought you were only chaffing.

DREW. So I was.

WHITE. It's rather too bad to keep on fooling her.

DREW (*turning indignantly to WHITE*). I'm *not* fooling her.

WHITE. That makes it far worse.

DREW. You don't understand, and I can't explain. It's too complicated. I mean—it's quite simple—but I'm not answerable to you. There are some things a man can't discuss. I suppose if I leave it at that—you'll go and think things.

WHITE. What would you think yourself if you saw two people always together, very intimate and confidential, and one of them was *you* ?

DREW. I should think nothing disrespectful if the other one was Mrs. Moxon. She's the best woman in

the world and she needs no defence from me. You gave me quite a wrong idea of her the first time I came—or I shouldn't have talked all that rubbish about making up to her. I thought she was going to be one of those precise, chilly-fingered Englishwomen, stiff with conceit and whalebone—you know the kind. I hadn't talked to her for ten minutes before I found out she was as straight and simple as a child, at first rather shy and mistrustful, but after we made friends so confiding. As she revealed herself, unconsciously, my heart went out to her. I was completely charmed and conquered. No woman has ever appealed to me as she does. I want to be always with her. I can't rest when I'm away. In the morning I can scarcely wait till it's decently late to come here. I'm happier if I've made her smile than if I were made an admiral. (*WHITE looks at him.*) But you needn't be afraid, for, you see, her simplicity disarms me, and her confidence puts me on my honour.

WHITE (thoughtfully). But, after all, she is a woman and you are a man.

DREW. You are full of useful information.

WHITE. If you want *my* opinion.

DREW. Thank you, I don't.

WHITE. I think you ought to go away.

DREW. I knew that was coming. It's what any one would say on the spur of the moment. It was my own first impulse—when I began to recognise where I was. (*WHITE looks at him.*) Oh, you needn't think I haven't walked up and down and round and round that studio of yours, arguing with myself till my own head went round and round too. At first I thought, "This won't do, this is all wrong." Then I thought, "Why, why ?" Love need not be guilty. It's only because I've debased it so often that I think it is something to be ashamed of. Why must I crush the strongest and best emotion I ever felt ? Don't we spend our lives searching out sympathetic companions ? And aren't we always having disappointments and dropping people because they won't do ? Well, if at last I have found some one who will do—some one who helps me to be my best self, some one whom I can help—why on earth should I leave her ?

WHITE. Because she's married.

DREW. She's not happy with her husband.

WHITE. How do you know?

DREW. How could any one be happy with Moxon?

WHITE. He's selfish and tiresome, but he's not bad-natured.

DREW (*vehemently*). He humiliates her, snubs her whenever she speaks. Sometimes when I hear him, knowing how sensitive she is, I can scarcely keep still. It's like seeing her struck. And I can't do anything.

WHITE. I am so afraid you *will* do something some time.

DREW (*sadly*). It would only get *her* into trouble.

WHITE. I think you magnify Mrs. Moxon's unhappiness. When a woman has been married as long as she has, I don't suppose she knows if she is happy or not. She's got so used to it.

DREW (*ironically*). That's such a comforting thought for them. Don't let us distress ourselves thinking how many women suffer in silence. Let's make up our minds that they like it.

WHITE. Even if Moxon is not as nice to her as he might be, I don't see that *you* can do anything.

DREW. I can distract her. I can show her that some one finds her charming. And while I can do the smallest thing to vary the monotony of her life, I stay.

WHITE. But you can't stay here for ever.

DREW. No, till I get my orders.

WHITE. The *chief* danger isn't you or people gossiping, it's—

DREW. What?

WHITE (*hesitating*). I don't know if it's safe to tell you.

DREW (*impatiently*). Go on.

WHITE (*hesitates, then blurts out*). She can't help showing she's in love with *you*.

DREW (*after a pause, during which he looks very grave*). Has any one spoken of this?

WHITE. Yes.

DREW. Who?

WHITE (*guiltily*). I did—to Miss Mills.

DREW. I think you might have kept quiet.

WHITE. But I had to enlighten her.

DREW. Eh?

WHITE. She was under the impression that you came here so often to see *her*, so I told her, and she told Moxon, and Moxon told Hassell, and—

DREW (*angrily*). So you are all spying and whispering, putting an evil construction on every innocent word and look. It's monstrous. When did you begin talking about this?

WHITE. Only this evening. There's no harm done yet.

DREW. But they are all on the look-out. Even as I say "Good-night," they'll think she lets me hold her hand a second longer than she need. They'll see a guilty meaning if she looks at me, or if she looks away. I won't have her watched and pointed at. I'll protect her from that. How? You've made it impossible for me to behave towards her in any other way. And they saw in my romance only another vulgar intrigue. (*He leans on the mantelshelf in deep thought before he turns to WHITE and says quietly.*) There's only one way now to save her from insult. I must go away. It does seem like deserting her. I must go at once. I'll leave to-morrow. I'll say "Good-bye" to Mrs. Moxon now. (*MRS. MOXON is heard singing again Tosti's "Good-bye" off the stage. DREW stops when he hears her, with his hand on the door.*) No, not now. I think it will be better to come up in the morning. I'm going home this way. (*Going to the window.*)

WHITE. All right. I'll go and get our hats.

(*WHITE leaves the door open as he slips out. The song is heard more distinctly.*)

DREW (*stands listening*). Good-bye, good-bye.

(*As CAPTAIN DREW goes out by the window, ERNEST WHITE returns with a hat in each hand.*)

WHITE. Hullo! Has he gone already? (*Crosses to the window.*)

(*Enter MISS MILLS hurriedly.*)

MISS MILLS (*calling*). Mr. White!

WHITE (*turning when he hears her call*). Oh, I say, we are going to cut home. I've persuaded him to go away to-morrow.

MISS MILLS. Now I didn't think you had it in you.

WHITE. How did you succeed with Mrs. Moxon?

MISS MILLS. Well, of course, women are much harder

to deal with than men. You had a very simple job. You only had to talk a man over, while I—

WHITE (*interrupting her*). Had no success at all. Tell Mrs. Moxon that Hal has to join his ship to-morrow. Tell her kindly.

MISS MILLS. Well, really, Mr White, I don't think it's your place to dictate to me.

WHITE. Tell her the way you think best.

MISS MILLS. I've tried woman to woman. That's no good. I know what I'll do, I'll make light of everything and laugh it all off.

WHITE. Splendid idea. I must hurry after Hal. Good-night.

(ERNEST WHITE *goes out*. MISS MILLS *follows to the window and looks after him*. Enter MRS. MOXON.)

MISS MILLS (*assuming unnatural cheerfulness*). Well, Martha, they've gone.

MRS. MOXON (*slightly surprised*). Gone. Without saying good-night?

MISS MILLS (*standing at the window*). Yes, there they are, crossing the field. (MRS. MOXON *joins her at the window*.) We shall know when they get home by the light in the studio window.

MRS. MOXON. Yes, I always know when Captain Drew is at home by that light among the trees.

MISS MILLS. I wonder he isn't afraid to sleep down there by himself. I should be.

MRS. MOXON. But he's so brave.

MISS MILLS (*breaks into a ringing laugh*). Such a good joke, Martha. It's against myself, too. You know I thought Captain Drew came here so often to see me.

MRS. MOXON (*smiling pleasantly*). Oh, did you, dear? It never struck me so.

MISS MILLS. I know better now. Oh, I can take a joke against myself in very good part. (*Stops laughing to say*.) Now some people were under the impression that he came to see you.

MRS. MOXON (*nervously*). Oh well—I suppose he comes to see all of us.

MISS MILLS. Sit down and let me tell you. (MRS. MOXON *sits slowly at the table, looking distrustfully at MISS MILLS, who resumes the unnaturally cheerful manner*.)

You know that man deserves whipping. It seems he made a wager with Mr. White that he could make you fall in love with him.

MRS. MOXON. I can't believe Captain Drew would do such a thing.

MISS MILLS. But Mr. White himself told me, and you know sailors are notorious for making love to all the women they meet.

MRS. MOXON. I don't think *he* is like that.

MISS MILLS. I expect he's like all the others, if one doesn't see him through rose-coloured spectacles. (*Laughing a little.* MRS. MOXON turns away.) I wouldn't trust a man with such taking manners.

MRS. MOXON. He is always so merry, but not unkind. (*Turns to MISS MILLS.*) It would be cruel to pay court to a woman to ridicule her.

MISS MILLS. Well, of course, Martha, you are not a young girl.

MRS. MOXON (*hastily*). No, no! I was not thinking of myself.

MISS MILLS. I'm glad he didn't win the wager.

MRS. MOXON. That was fortunate, wasn't it. Perhaps if I had been a weaker woman—— (*Her voice breaks, she looks away from MISS MILLS.*)

MISS MILLS (*watching her anxiously, but trying to speak gaily*). It doesn't matter now, anyway, because he's gone away.

MRS. MOXON (*receiving this intelligence with a sudden shock at her heart*). Gone away!

MISS MILLS (*always watching her anxiously, but thinking it best to laugh*). Yes, to join his ship.

MRS. MOXON (*showing her emotion, rises, and goes quickly to MISS MILLS, seizing hold of her*). Child, child, stop laughing! Tell me! Will he never come back?

MISS MILLS (*alarmed, takes a step back*). Martha!

MRS. MOXON (*recovering herself, leaves hold of MISS MILLS, and says in very measured tones*). It's nothing. I was taken by surprise, that's all. You'd better say good-night to me now.

MISS MILLS. Good-night. (*She looks at MRS. MOXON, who does not seem to notice her, then goes out.*)

MRS. MOXON. I can't bear it. (*Clenches her hands together and holds them to her mouth to prevent her sobs*

being heard, crosses towards the window and looks out into the darkness ; stretches her arms towards the window. Passionately.) Come back and tell me it's not true. Tell me, tell me ! (Pauses, drops her arms, and says in a different tone.) Tell me. (Pauses, then says with decision.) I must know. (Snatches up her scarf and goes out quickly through window, putting on her scarf as she goes.) I must know. (Goes out.)

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE.—*The studio in ERNEST WHITE's garden. A high square room with a door opposite the audience opening into the garden, and upon the left-hand side a curtained entrance to the bedroom. Covering the greater part of one wall is a large hooded fireplace. There are no easels or signs of a painter's work, as the room is not now used as a studio. The room is simply furnished, but it contains a settee, and near it, a small writing-desk. At a short distance is a table with a lamp standing on it, also a syphon of soda water, a decanter of whisky, a jug of plain water, and four tumblers on a tray. Two chairs stand near the table and against the wall facing the fireplace is a low set of bookshelves with boxes of cigars and cigarettes upon it. Mats and rugs on the floor and other furniture to make the place both well furnished and comfortable.*

CAPTAIN DREW and ERNEST WHITE enter dressed as in *Act II.*

WHITE. I'll just have one drink with you before I turn in. (*Mixes whiskies at table, while DREW sits disconsolately on settee; glances once or twice at DREW before he says.*) You'll feel better when you get right away. You ought to go to some place where there's plenty of dancing and fun, and you'll soon be yourself again.

DREW (*despondently*). Please don't try to cheer me up. It's the one thing I couldn't stand just now.

WHITE. Have you thought where you'll go to-morrow?

DREW. I'll take a train somewhere.

WHITE. Why not have a few days in London?

DREW. What's the use? The bounce has gone out of everything.

WHITE. Well, here. (*Brings DREW a tumbler of whisky and soda.*)

DREW (*taking it mechanically and holding it in his hand*). I suppose there isn't a train anywhere to-night?

WHITE (*standing near DREW*). No, the last one left at ten fifteen. It's nearly eleven now.

DREW. Is that all? Think of the hours and hours till to-morrow. I never could stand waiting. I always had to be doing something. Now that I've made up my mind to go, I want to go—not that there's anywhere to go to. I wish they'd have a war and send me out to get shot. (*Sighs as he holds up his glass and says.*) Chin chin. (*Drinks.*)

WHITE (*drinks, standing*). At any rate you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you did the right thing.

DREW. It's the only thing to do—to go away and leave her. I've known that for some time, but I wouldn't own up, even to myself. Somehow, the last few days, we've had less to say to each other. I couldn't go on saying ordinary things, when it was always on the tip of my tongue to tell her one thing. And it's the silences that are so dangerous. All the self-control of weeks may be undone in a moment, and it isn't the long self-control that goes to your credit then. It's the one moment of weakness that goes to your discredit. Oh, well, it does no good to talk about it. (*He rises and puts his glass on the writing-table. Picks up a dress suit-case, opens it on the table, begins putting in clothes.*) I'd better get my gear together.

WHITE. Would you like some one to come and do your packing?

DREW. No, thanks. It may do me good to get in a bad temper, and I'm sure to do that if I do my own packing. (*Opens a bag.*)

WHITE. Will you be all right if I leave you?

DREW. Oh, yes. Your man generally comes later on to see if I want anything.

WHITE. Then I'll say good-night.

DREW. Good-night.

WHITE. Will you have the door left open?

DREW. Yes, thanks. I like the air. Go to your bunk and dream of Izzy.

WHITE. I've dreamed of her three nights running.

(*As WHITE goes out of the room, DREW takes the rose from his buttonhole, holds it in his hand, looking at it.*)

DREW (*tenderly*). Poor lady !

(*He pours some water into a tumbler, places the rose carefully in the water, and hums the refrain of Tosti's "Good-bye" as he begins getting clothes in bag. MRS. MOXON appears in the doorway and stands on the threshold, watching him. DREW turns and sees MRS. MOXON. He stands still. They both betray their nervousness while trying to speak casually.*)

MRS. MOXON. You are packing, I see.

DREW. I find I must leave here to-morrow.

MRS. MOXON. So I have heard.

DREW. I meant to come up and say "good-bye" to you in the morning.

MRS. MOXON. I did not hear that.

DREW. I'm so sorry to go, but, of course, one can't be away on leave all the time.

MRS. MOXON. I quite understand.

DREW. Won't you sit down ?

MRS. MOXON. No, I mustn't say. It was so oppressive in the house I stepped on to the terrace. I could see your light through the trees, and it's only across two fields—— (*Moves away*.)

DREW (*watching her intently*). You want to tell me something.

MRS. MOXON (*irresolutely*). No. Don't let me interrupt your packing.

DREW. I'm not sure that I shall pack now. (*He closes the portmanteau, and goes to the door, which he shuts.*)

MRS. MOXON (*her eyes fall on the rose in the tumbler. She exclaims with almost childish pleasure*). You did put my rose in water ? (*She stands looking at the rose and smiling, and does not notice DREW. He stands with his back to the door watching her. She looks about the room.*) So this is where you sit of an evening. I often wondered how it looked.

DREW. And I have so often imagined you coming in at the door and moving about the place that now I hardly know if I'm not dreaming.

MRS. MOXON (*turns to him and says abruptly*). I did come to tell you something—to ask you something.

DREW (*pauses, comes forward*). What?

MRS. MOXON (*after a short pause, says awkwardly*). Have you been making fun of me all this while?

DREW. No, no. It's not true.

MRS. MOXON. I couldn't quite believe it of you, but they told me—something about a wager between you and Mr. White.

DREW. I'll tell you everything.

MRS. MOXON. I want the truth.

DREW (*with an effort*). Before I saw you—I said—
(*Stops, drops his head*.)

MRS. MOXON (*waiting for him to go on*). Yes.

DREW. I'm so afraid you won't understand me.

MRS. MOXON. I shall try.

DREW. I never knew a really good woman very well—till now. You see, in the Navy we go out into the world so soon. We get our ideals knocked on the head in no time. And if we are stationed abroad for a long while, as I was, we get to know a lot of second-rate people who make a great deal of us. It's all done out of kindness, but the trouble is, we think that's life, we think those are real people, and it lowers our standard—especially our standard of women.

MRS. MOXON. Ah! (*Shakes her head sadly*.)

DREW. I was like that when I came here, and I told Ernest—I think I said I was going to try and make an impression on you.

MRS. MOXON. Then it is true?

DREW. It was before I knew you. I'd never seen you. It does make a difference, doesn't it? If I said that before or after I knew you?

MRS. MOXON (*doubtfully*). Yes—oh, yes. I'm glad you pointed that out to me.

DREW. Of course, when I knew you, it was different. I realised how different that very first day. And ever since—day by day, while we've been together. As I've looked deeper and deeper into your mind and into your heart, I've been filled with reverence for your unselfishness, your patience, and your devotion. I've seen my ideal of a woman. The woman I would like my wife to have been—but it's too late now. (*Moves away*),

commanding himself.) I think I ought to go away from here.

MRS. MOXON (*nervously*). I think so. I think so.

DREW. I shall remember this past month as the happiest time of my whole life.

MRS. MOXON (*wistfully*). A pleasant holiday?

DREW. Something much more real than that. A good influence that will stay with me for ever.

MRS. MOXON (*reassured*). I shan't feel ashamed any more. It hurt me to think how much I had done to try and please you, and then to be told you were only making fun of me. But that's all over now. (*Abruptly*.) I must go back. (*Gives him her hand*.) Good-bye, and thank you. (*Moving up, he detains her*.)

DREW (*taking her hand, says tenderly*). The best I can wish you is that you'll forget me.

MRS. MOXON (*simply and gravely*). I have told you I shall never forget you.

DREW. Will you be just as content after I'm gone as you were before I came?

MRS. MOXON (*withdraws her hand*). I was dead before you came. You made me live.

DREW. It is better to live, even if one suffers.

MRS. MOXON. Oh, yes. You see, I was never one to lead. I could always feel a great deal more than I could say, and I don't think my husband was ever of opinion that a wife should be a companion. Sometimes I have wondered if he wouldn't be as happy with any one else who looked after him as well as I did. He was always kind to me—at least, he was never unkind—only he forgets. He doesn't see how a woman prizes a little notice taken of her now and then, and she can't ask for it. Perhaps it's vain to want attention, but so very little makes us happy. And I have never had it in all my life—till now. Oh, the first time you sent me flowers! I cried so. And when I had a headache one day and kept my room, and you came early the next morning to see if I was better. Do you remember? It is all these pretty attentions you have paid me that have made me live again. That you should think me worth it, not because I am useful, but as a woman! I'm so grateful to you, so grateful.

DREW (*brokenly*). Don't thank me, please don't. It's

nothing I've done for you. It's nothing I *can* do, and I want to do so much—— (*His voice breaks.*)

MRS. MOXON (*crying*). Dear friend, dear friend. I know it's very hard to say good-bye, but we always knew this had to come.

DREW (*takes her hands*). It breaks my heart to leave you, dear, to leave you.

MRS. MOXON. I shall miss you. I shall miss you dreadfully.

DREW (*anxiously*). Do you dread going back?

MRS. MOXON (*simply*). My life is there.

DREW (*looking sorrowfully at her*). If only we had met in time.

MRS. MOXON (*gently withdraws her hand*). It's best as it is. Often in the last few days I have thought—suppose you and I had met long ago, and had become engaged and married, it wouldn't have been wise. I should be such a quiet mouse among your gay friends—it's best as it is. Try to think that. And now, good-night, dear friend.

DREW. Good-bye, my dear, dear lady.

(*He draws her gently to him, folds her tenderly in his arms, and kisses her forehead. She yields naturally to his embrace. There are two knocks at the door. They separate.*)

DREW (*speaks assuringly in a low tone*). It's only the servant come to see if I want anything. Stand aside while I speak to him. It's all right, it's all right.

(*She stands out of sight of door which DREW there-upon opens. CHESTER HASSELL appears in the doorway. He has been drinking, so that his manner is blustering; but he has all his wits about him.*)

HASSELL. Good evening, Drew.

DREW (*taken by surprise*). Hullo!

(*HASSELL, smiling unpleasantly, seems about to enter.*)

DREW (*quickly*). I can't ask you in.

HASSELL. Oh! Why not?

DREW. To tell you the truth, Hassell, I don't care to have you here.

HASSELL. Am I disturbing a pleasant little interview?

DREW. Not at all, but you must have noticed that ever since I came here I've avoided meeting you.

HASSELL (*insolently*). Oh, yes ; I've noticed it. I've not dropped in just in a friendly way. I shouldn't come here unless I had something very important to tell you.

DREW. It's too late now. You can come and see me in the morning. (*Tries to shut door on HASSELL.*)

HASSELL (*holding door to prevent DREW shutting it*). What I have to say won't keep till morning.

DREW. Then say it here.

HASSELL. It must be said behind closed doors. (*Indicating off stage.*) Too many trees and bushes about. Some one might be listening.

DREW. What nonsense !

HASSELL. I suppose there's nobody in there who could overhear us ?

DREW. Nobody. (*Motions MRS. MOXON to leave.*)

HASSELL. Then we may as well go in.

(*Attempts to enter, as MRS. MOXON goes up the steps and behind the curtains.*)

DREW (*losing his temper*). Look here, Hassell, I won't have you forcing your way in like this.

HASSELL. Then there *is* some one there.

DREW. No, but—

HASSELL (*impudently*). It wouldn't be the first time you were caught with a woman. (*Laughing.*) Don't you remember that night in Hong Kong ?

DREW. I don't want to have to turn you out.

HASSELL (*threateningly*). If you try anything of that sort on, do you know what I shall do ? I shall raise such a shout that Ernest White and all his servants will come running to see what the row is. (*Faces DREW defiantly.*) Now, then, may I come in ?

DREW (*defiantly*). No.

HASSELL. I can see the light in White's bedroom window. He'd easily hear me if I called. (*Puts his hands to his mouth threatening to shout.*)

DREW. Stop ! I don't want a brawl here. (*Looks round to see if MRS. MOXON has gone and gives way.*) Say what you want to—quickly.

HASSELL. We must have the door closed. (*Comes in and closes door, looking at the curtains.*) I suppose I may sit down ?

DREW. Sit here. (*Places an arm-chair near the table with its back to the curtains L.*)

HASSELL (*hesitates*). No, thanks, I'll sit here. (*Sits facing the curtains ; lays his hat on the table ; presses his hand to his brow.*) Oh, dear, I've got such a head.

DREW (*eagerly*). Have a drink. (*Takes tumbler and whisky decanter in his hand.*)

HASSELL. Thanks, I don't mind. (*DREW fills tumbler half full of whisky. HASSELL watches him.*) Steady ! (*As he takes the tumbler.*) I may be a bit on, but I've still got my wits about me. (*He pours some of the whisky on the floor.*) Fill it up, please. Rather nice quarters you've got here.

DREW (*curtly*). Yes, they are all right.

HASSELL. Just this and— (*Pointing to the curtains.*) I suppose that's your bedroom.

DREW. Yes, but—your business, please.

HASSELL. Yes. I've been playing bridge at the Fishers' this evening, and— (*Takes the tumbler with the rose in it ; smells the rose.*)

DREW (*indignantly*). Don't touch that. (*Takes the tumbler from HASSELL. Puts it at top of table.*)

HASSELL (*watching DREW ; surprised*). All right.

DREW (*faces HASSELL*). Now, then, what do you want to say ?

HASSELL. I've been playing bridge at the Fishers'—

DREW (*impatiently*). You've said that once.

HASSELL. Have a bit of patience. Moxon was there.

DREW (*affecting indifference*). Well ?

HASSELL. Well, one time when I was dummy I wandered into the hall ; the drawing-room door was open, and I overheard part of a conversation between Lucy Fisher and a friend of hers. You know she's a bit of a scandalmonger, Lucy Fisher is.

DREW. I scarcely know her.

HASSELL. She was telling her friend about you and Mrs. Moxon. Said you were carrying on a desperate flirtation, and that Moxon was being fooled.

DREW (*trying to speak casually*). Women will talk scandal, you know, even where there's no scandal to talk.

HASSELL. Yes.

DREW (*ironically*). I'm afraid I shall not be able to provide any further interest or amusement for Miss Lucy Fisher and her friends, as I leave here to-morrow. (*HASSELL looks surprised.*) In fact, I

must pack now. (*Rises.*) I'm sure you'll excuse me. (*Takes HASSELL's hat and gives it to him.*) Good-night.

HASSELL (*takes hat*). I've not nearly done yet. (*Lays hat on table.*) When the rubber was finished, I told Moxon what I had overheard.

DREW (*in a rage*). You—you— (*Controls himself.*) Go on. (*Sits on the arm of a chair facing HASSELL across the table.*)

HASSELL. It seems that Miss Mills had already told him that you and his wife were a bit too thick—but he thought nothing of it. But when he heard it a second time—you know he's one of those slow, half-asleep men : it takes a lot to rouse him, but when he *is* roused—by Jove ! He'd have made a scene if I hadn't persuaded him to leave the house.

DREW. Where did you take him ?

HASSELL. Home. He is looking for his wife. (*Pause, during which they look at each other.*) When he gets home he tells the servant to send Mrs. Moxon to him. The servant hunts all over the house and comes to say her mistress can't be found. Miss Mills doesn't know where she is. Nobody knows where she is. Consternation of Moxon. I suggest his wife is here. He tells me I'm drunk. Now it vexes me to be told I'm drunk, so I don't tell Moxon that from the drawing-room window I had distinctly seen a woman hurrying across the fields towards your studio. No. I decide to keep that to myself—for future use. Moxon thinks his wife is in the garden and goes out to look for her. I say, "All right, I'll look for her, too." Moxon disappears among the shadows of the garden, I come down here. Is she here ?

DREW. No.

HASSELL (*hesitates a moment, glances at curtains and then at book-case.*) I think I see some cigars there. (*Pointing to the book-case.*) May I help myself ?

DREW (*rises abruptly and stops HASSELL as he moves forward.*) Yes, do.

(*He crosses quickly to the book-case, and brings box of cigars, which he pushes towards HASSELL. HASSELL nods his head knowingly when DREW's back is turned.*)

HASSELL (*taking a cigar and lighting it.*) I suppose you think I'm going to pry.

DREW. No. (*Replaces the cigar-box.*)

HASSELL. Now come, be reasonable ; I'm pretty well convinced that Moxon's wife is here, but it's nothing to me whether she is or not. I'm not here for Moxon, I'm here for myself. You understand ? (*Momentary pause.*) Well, I'll be perfectly frank. I'll admit I'm a scoundrel —a damned——

DREW. Sh !

HASSELL (*quickly and craftily*). Will she hear us ?

DREW. There is no one to hear us.

HASSELL. Since when did you become so particular about language ?

DREW. Never mind that. I only want to save you the trouble of telling me what you are. I know well enough.

HASSELL. Yes—well, as I was saying—I'm pretty well convinced that Moxon's wife is here. I think I may say I'm quite convinced now ; so I'll come to the point. I want money—from you.

DREW. You won't get it.

HASSELL. We'll see about that. If you write me a cheque for one thousand pounds, I'll go straight to Moxon and tell him his wife is not here.

DREW. Don't keep on repeating that preposterous story. (*Desperately trying to make light of HASSELL's accusation.*) You see a woman coming in this direction and you at once fly to the conclusion that she is Mrs. Moxon coming here. Who's going to take *your* word against—(*about to point to where she is, lowers his arm*) —her ?

HASSELL. You think I daren't expose you. You think I'm only using threats to see what I can get out of you. I want to ruin you. I'm tired of seeing you succeed where *I* fail. In the Service it was always that. You went up and up and I went under. And now, again—I was after Moxon's wife once, but she turned me down. I failed. But *you* come along, and it's easy. And then you must both go and spoil my chance with Miss Mills. With *her* money I could have saved myself—only *you* stood in my way again—you and your paramour.

(DREW scizes him and forces him on to settee.)

DREW (*in a rage*). You beast—you hound ! I'll kill you like a dog.

MRS. MOXON (*within, in loud and terrified tones*). No, no !
(DREW pauses. DREW and HASSELL look towards curtain. The curtains move, and MRS. MOXON appears. DREW looks from the curtains to HASSELL, then crosses to the table, opens a drawer, and takes out a cheque book. HASSELL watches every movement of DREW.)

HASSELL. That's right. Make it out for a thousand, and I'll go straight to Moxon and say—

MRS. MOXON (*on top of stairs*). I forbid.

(DREW and HASSELL look towards her. MRS. MOXON is overcome by the humiliation she feels in facing HASSELL in that place. She walks unsteadily, as if she could scarcely drag one foot after another, but in spite of her physical weakness her resolution is firm.)

DREW. It's our only way out of it now.

MRS. MOXON. I forbid. I won't save myself by a lie. It's for me to say, and I forbid.

(DREW, *seeing her inflexible, tears up the cheque*.)

HASSELL (*taking his hat from the table*). Very well. You've had your chance. I suppose you've got sense enough to see I shouldn't be likely to be here on a job of the sort unless I was pretty desperate. I'm ruined without that money. (*Backing towards door*.) But I'll not go under alone.

DREW. Hassell !

HASSELL (*as he goes out, calls loud*). Hullo, Moxon, hullo !

(DREW and MRS. MOXON left alone in the room by his departure, stand facing each other.)

MOXON (*heard calling a very long way off*). Hassell !

MRS. MOXON. He mustn't find me here.

DREW. Their eries will have roused the cottage ; they'll be looking out. This bright moonlight night they'd see you go out of the door.

MRS. MOXON. You're right.

DREW. I must make some excuses—I was going away, and you came to bid me good-bye—and then there's your life—your blameless life—lived day by day before him—these ten years. He's suspicious already, and appearances are as bad as they can be. (*Pauses, and looks down at her*.)

MRS. MOXON. Yes, yes.

DREW. If the worst comes to the worst—if he takes Hassell's word ; if he won't believe yours—I shall do all I can—I mean afterwards, always, everything a man can do, I'll do. I'll leave the Service—

MRS. MOXON (*putting up her hands to prevent him going on*). I mustn't let you go on. What you suggest would be impossible. In case you should think otherwise, I had better make myself quite plain, and tell you that it never could be possible—not for me. If he won't believe me—if he thinks I have done something which would unfit me to go back to him and the boys—it would be the end of my life. Outside my home I am nothing. Even if I saw things differently—if my upbringing, my ideas, my religion were not what they are—I'm too old now, too set in my ways, to make a change. I know you would do everything to help me—and I have never met with such devotion as yours—but, you see, no one *can* help me now ; it's between him and me.

(DREW goes up to the window, pulls the blind aside and looks off, expressing growing mystification as he recounts what he sees.)

DREW. There's no one in sight. I can't make it out. The moon makes everything so clear, I thought I should have seen him coming. Ah ! People moving near the house ; three of them—a woman and two men. Now one walks away—that must be Hassell. He's coming across the garden as if he were going home, and the others are going towards the house. They've gone in and closed the door.

MRS. MOXON (*in sudden alarm*). Shut out ! He wouldn't even come to look for me. He closed the door and left me.

DREW (*going to her*). Not that. It can't be that.

MRS. MOXON. If he loved me, wouldn't he have come ? Could he have helped coming ?

DREW (*seizing her hands*). What have I brought you to ?

MRS. MOXON (*resisting*). Let me go.

DREW. I can't let you face him alone.

MRS. MOXON. I'm beyond your help now.

DREW. I can't let you go like this. No—listen. I said I'd stand by you, and it's not only because I owe

it to you ; it's more than that. It's from my heart. My heart is yours ! My life is yours ! All I have is yours if you'll take it. All I have—everything—it's yours ! Don't go.

MRS. MOXON. Don't stop me ! Let me go ! Don't stop me !

CURTAIN.

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE.—*The same as Acts I. and II. It is the morning after Act III.*

MISS MILLS is standing behind the table. She is arranging flowers in a vase which stands on the table before her. A tray of cut flowers stands beside the vase.

(Enter CAPTAIN DREW from the open French window.)

DREW. Good-morning, Miss Mills

MISS MILLS. Good-morning.

DREW. You sent for me.

MISS MILLS. Yes. I thought of running down to see you, but the world is such a gossip—especially Luey Fisher; and Mr. White might have been at the window, so to avoid the appearance of anything clandestine—

DREW (cutting her short). Yes, yes, but for goodness' sake, tell me why you sent for me.

MISS MILLS. To tell you it turned out better than you might have expected.

DREW (very much relieved, says under his breath as he half turns from her). Thank God!

MISS MILLS (watching him). You evidently know what I mean.

DREW (on his guard, turns to her). No.

MISS MILLS (provokingly). Then you won't be at all interested in what I was going to tell you.

DREW (embarrassed, but trying to appear casual). Has Mr. Moxon gone to the works as usual?

MISS MILLS. Yes.

DREW. Ah!

MISS MILLS. But that's nothing to go by. If the house were on fire George would go to the works as usual.

DREW (*anxiously, but carefully*). Isn't everything as usual?

MISS MILLS. As far as Mr. Moxon knows, it is.

DREW (*relieved*). Ah!

MISS MILLS. That's the main thing, isn't it?

DREW. Yes—is it?

MISS MILLS. What a to-do there was last night.

DREW. Was there?

MISS MILLS. Don't pretend you don't know all about it. (*Looks at him before she continues, but he is inscrutable*.) Mr. Moxon would have gone down to see what it was—only— (*Pauses*.)

DREW (*eagerly*). Why didn't he?

MISS MILLS (*delighted*). Then you *are* just a little curious?

DREW (*earnestly*). Why didn't Moxon go?

MISS MILLS (*seeing how serious he is*). Because *I* came to the rescue.

DREW (*surprised*). You?

MISS MILLS. The minute they came from the Fishers' and began asking for Martha, I knew where she was.

DREW (*wondering*). Oh!

MISS MILLS. Instinct.

DREW. Really.

MISS MILLS (*importantly*). Women often *feel* things are happening.

DREW (*doubtfully*). Yes, but they—they often feel things are happening when they aren't. (*Crosses away from her*.)

MISS MILLS (*annoyed*). Oh! I've a good mind not to tell you now for saying that. (*Talking to his back*.) Well—not unless you want to hear more than I want to tell. (*Pauses. DREW turns to her*.) And there must be a tacit understanding between us that Martha was where we both know she was.

DREW (*turning to her*). How should *I* know where Mrs. Moxon was?

MISS MILLS (*promptly*). You shouldn't, but you do.

DREW (*goes to her and looks at her with grave meaning*). No. *I* don't know, and *you* don't know; but if what you have to tell me can be of any service to Mrs. Moxon, I had better hear it.

MISS MILLS. That's not fair. That's putting me on

my honour not to press the point further. I do think I might be let into the secret a little more after I was such a help. (*With resignation as she places a vase of flowers on mantelshelf.*) But you'd better know what I did. (*Comes down towards him.*) When that odious Hassell went capering down to your place I joined Mr. Moxon in the garden. I soon found out his suspicions. (*In parenthesis.*) It's easier to get things out of him than out of you. (*Continuing her narrative.*) Well, I spent the time telling him everything I could think of against that Hassell. I'd almost convinced him that the creature was untrustworthy when he came capering back with his story about Martha being—*you know where*. Then Mr. Moxon began to waver, so I said, "Can't you see the man is in liquor?" But still he was for going down to look for Martha—so I let out at him. I told him if he took Hassell's word against his wife and went down there to look for her I should tell her and she'd never forgive him. "But what can I do?" he said. "Where must I look for her?" "Anywhere but there," I said. (*DREW smiles gratefully at MISS MILLS.*) That made a man of him. He was nearly dignified when he sent Hassell about his business—and if Mr. Hassell had had a tail it would have hung down. Well, then—then—

DREW. Then you and Mr. Moxon went into the house?

MISS MILLS. What makes you think that?

DREW. What did you and Moxon do then?

MISS MILLS. We went into the house. (*Seriously.*) But, of course, there was no Martha—and I could only suggest she was strolling in the lane and had forgotten how late it was. (*Her expression softens.*) After a little while she came home. Poor Martha. She just hastened upstairs without a word.

DREW. Didn't they meet?

MISS MILLS (*faltering*). No—because when I suggested she was strolling in the lane—George got another idea. You know, there's a little grave in the churchyard and he thought she might have gone there—so he went to look. (*Vexed at having nearly made herself cry.*) It was so silly of him to think of that. He has no perception—none at all. (*Wipes her eyes and tries to cheer herself up.*) As soon as Martha was safe at home, I flew to George

with the joyful news. Of course, he was for asking her where she'd been, so quick as thought I said, "No. Don't ask her—because you can't let her know you've been anxious without letting her see you've been suspicious too." So he said nothing about it. (*Smiles at DREW.*) Wasn't I a help? (*DREW smiles at her, nods gratefully, then sighs.*)

DREW. I wish we hadn't had to spill so many lies.

MISS MILLS (*cheerfully*). Oh, but there's a difference. If I tell lies to save myself, I'm a liar; but if I tell them to save a friend—I'm a gentleman. And now I suppose you'll sail away and the Moxons will go on just as before. Poor Martha! How dreadful it must be to belong to any one.

DREW (*sadly*). How dreadful it is not to belong to any one.

MISS MILLS. *You*, I suppose, are wedded to the sea.

DREW (*as before*). Yes, it sounds poetical, but it's damned cold!

MISS MILLS. But an unmarried naval officer is such a free lance.

DREW (*thoughtfully*). Yes, until you bump up against one of the big things and see right into the heart of a home. Then, instead of saying, "How humdrum it is," you say, "How beautiful!" All those habits and associations and family affections—what ballast they give. If you've neglected to form ties and take up responsibilities of your own, you've shirked your share in the problems of life. And by and by you don't feel any longer how splendid it is to be free. You feel envious and ashamed and out of it. The joys of the free lance aren't all they are cracked up to be.

MISS MILLS (*after a pause*). I wish you wouldn't talk like that. You make me feel so uncomfortable.

DREW (*surprised*). You? Why you?

MISS MILLS (*nearly crying*). I know perfectly well it's all aimed at *me*.

DREW. My dear Miss Mills.

MISS MILLS. Oh, I know you mean me. I shouldn't mind you saying it—only—it's so true. I always meant to marry him some time. I didn't know there was any hurry. *You've* made me feel as if he was my last chance.

DREW (*kindly*). We never know which is our last chance till we've lost it.

MISS MILLS (*thoughtfully*). I like Mr. White very much, but I expeeted to find love more devouring. I ought to be ready to chop off my head for his sake. I never felt that way about any one yet.

DREW. I don't think most people ever do.

MISS MILLS. I suppose it would have happened by now if it was going to. (*Slowly and thoughtfully*.) Perhaps I'd better—

DREW. Not if you don't love him.

MISS MILLS. He hasn't said he wants to marry any one else, has he? He has. I can see he has. It's Lucy Fisher. It's no use saying it isn't. If it wasn't, you'd have said so. Lucy Fisher—that fat, freekled-faeed thing—my best friend, too! Oh! She'd better not.

(Enter ERNEST WHITE. *He wears flannels.* MISS MILLS's manner changes as soon as WHITE appears; she becomes smiling and gracious.)

MISS MILLS (*shaking hands with WHITE*). Oh! Good-morning, Mr. White. What a pleasant morning. You look as if you were dressed for tennis.

WHITE. Yes. I'm on my way to the Fishers'.

MISS MILLS (*with repressed suspicion and anger; taking her hand away*). The Fishers'!

WHITE. I knew I should find *you* here. (To DREW.)

DREW. It's the last time.

(He goes out.)

WHITE. He really is going away to-day.

MISS MILLS. I shall be going away soon, too.

WHITE (*in a matter-of-fact tone*). Oh. (Plays with the flowers on the table.)

MISS MILLS. You won't care.

WHITE. Yes, I shall.

MISS MILLS. Oh, no, you won't. Lucy Fisher will be here.

WHITE (*coming to her, in mild surprise*). What makes you say that?

MISS MILLS. Nothing. (*Wonderingly*.) But I can't think what you can possibly see in Lucy Fisher.

WHITE. She's a great friend of yours.

MISS MILLS. That's how I know there's nothing in her.

WHITE. What have you got against her?

MISS MILLS. Nothing ; but a girl who wastes her mornings playing tennis—

WHITE. What else should she do ?

MISS MILLS. Of course, if she's not domesticated—I must go on doing the flowers. (*Seizes the scissors in one hand and some flowers in the other and snips their stems.*)

WHITE (*putting his tennis racket on ottoman*). Am I in the way ? (MISS MILLS *flings the scissors on the tray with a clatter*.) What's the matter ?

MISS MILLS (*annoyed, and trying not to cry*). Nothing. Please don't speak to me. (*Turns away, trying to control herself*.)

WHITE. Have I said the wrong thing ?

(MISS MILLS *goes quickly up towards the window*.

WHITE *at first looks puzzled. Then a light slowly breaks over his face. He goes to MISS MILLS—goes straight up to her and embraces her.*)

WHITE. Izzy !

MISS MILLS (*yielding, falls on his shoulders*). Ernest !

WHITE. I knew, if I kept on, you wouldn't be able to resist me.

MISS MILLS (*disengaging herself and laughing*). Oh ! How clever of you.

WHITE. I don't mean because I'm so nice, but it's the only way if one isn't naturally a winner.

MISS MILLS. Don't say such dreadful things, dearest. I always meant to marry you. The idea was always at the back of my head. It only needed Lucy Fisher to bring it to the front. And—and other things have happened that have set me thinking a little.

WHITE (*murmurs*). Izzy !

(*Re-enter CAPTAIN DREW.*)

DREW. Here's Moxon coming from the works.

MISS MILLS (*to DREW*). You'll stay and see him ?

DREW. Yes, I'd better—just meet him.

WHITE. I must go on to the Fishers'.

MISS MILLS (*cheerfully, to WHITE*). Give my love to Lucy.

WHITE. Very well—(*hesitates, very much embarrassed*)—darling.

(*He leaves DREW with MISS MILLS.*)

DREW (*surprised*). Darling ! (Smiles). Oh !

MISS MILLS. Yes—just now.

DREW. Then you and I are cousins. (*Going towards her.*) Allow me to—

MISS MILLS (*thinking he is going to kiss her*). Not until my wedding day.

DREW. Not congratulate you ?

MISS MILLS (*confused and smiling*). Oh ! Thank you.

DREW (*emotionally taking both her hands and looking in her face*). I'm so glad—so very glad. He's such a good fellow. I hope you'll both be very happy. (MISS MILLS *smiles back at him, realising (as he does) his own loneliness. He turns away from her before he says.*) He knows nothing about last night ?

MISS MILLS. I haven't told him.

(MR. MOXON *is seen outside the window.*)

DREW. And you don't think there's any danger from Hassell ?

MISS MILLS. Oh, no. I'm sure George will never believe anything *he* says now—only you and I know—so she's quite safe.

(Enter MOXON, *with a very serious face.*)

MISS MILLS (*cheerfully*). Captain Drew has called to say good-bye to us.

(MOXON *looks at DREW, who moves away to the window.*)

MOXON (*to MISS MILLS*). Has my wife told you we can't ask you to stay any longer ?

MISS MILLS (*surprised*). No.

MOXON. You can't very well stay here alone with me. Martha leaves home to-day.

(DREW *looks round.*)

MISS MILLS. For long ?

MOXON. Until I decide what is best to be done.

MISS MILLS. Is anything the matter ?

MOXON. I know all about last night.

MISS MILLS. You've seen Mr. Hassell. You surely don't take his word against ours.

MOXON. No, I don't, but this morning my wife came and told me everything herself.

(DREW and MISS MILLS *look at each other in dismay.*)

MISS MILLS. I must go to Martha. Oh, these good women ! Always most dangerous when the danger is all over.

(*As MISS MILLS goes out of the room DREW turns once more to the window, and, after taking his hat, stops.*)

DREW (*turning back*). I can't go away without speaking a word.

MOXON (*interrupting him*). Don't let me hear excuses.

DREW. I've none to make for myself. But *she's* not the one who ought to suffer. She didn't see where she was drifting. *I didn't look ahead.*

MOXON (*turning to DREW resentfully*). Why couldn't you let us alone? We were very happy. (*Pause. He meets DREW's sorrowful and almost reproachful gaze and becomes ashamed.*) I didn't know but what she was happy. (*Turns away.*)

DREW. I don't suppose you *can* believe in my good faith now. But I'm sure you'll be fair and put the blame in the right place.

MOXON (*doubting DREW's good intentions*). You don't like to go away feeling you've come between a man and his wife.

DREW. If I were thinking of myself, would I urge you to forgive her? Last night—down there—while we waited and listened for your coming—you know in such moments how thoughts fly and fancies crowd—it seemed to me that in spite of all my efforts to save her, we were being forced together. And my heart leaped at the thought.

MOXON (*angrily*). What!

DREW. But *her* thoughts were not of *me*. They were all of home. I was nothing to her then. I realised then that her only chance of abiding happiness was here.

MOXON. I can't forgive her. When I think of all I went through last night. I thought she was grieving for the child—the little girl who died—sometimes she gets so depressed about it. I'd noticed she was strange last evening, and when she was missing last night, I feared she might be wandering—an absence like people get. I thought of the river. I reproached myself so bitterly for having gone out and left her. (*Resentfully.*) And all the while she was down there with *you*.

DREW. It was what she said to me then which changed me—made me see that the only way I could serve her

was to efface myself, to leave her to follow the life she had already taken up and half lived through. The husband of such a woman as your wife need fear no rival. For her there is only one man who ever really enters her life. Others may offer her devotion, but no one else can bring her happiness. Nobody knows that better than she does. Surely the proof is in her confession. After your suspicions were at rest—when she had nothing to fear—she came and told you everything herself.

MOXON. Haven't I given her everything a man could ? Haven't I worked for her and been faithful to her ? The least she can do is to be loyal to me. She might have known that I love her.

DREW. She was starved—starved for a show of love. Women can't take love for granted all the time. There is in every woman such an everlasting need for love—love shown and expressed. It's a need of her nature which must be satisfied.

MOXON. I've got none of those ways which seem to please women.

DREW. If she feels your heart is towards her, I don't think the words and the ways would matter much.

(Enter MRS. MOXON with a basket of keys in her hand.)

MRS. MOXON. I've brought the keys. (Stops as she sees DREW. DREW looks at MRS. MOXON. MOXON does not notice DREW.)

DREW. Mrs. Moxon, my leave is up. Good-bye !

(He hastens from the room.)

(In the following scene MR. and MRS. MOXON are both timid and embarrassed. MRS. MOXON crosses to MOXON and takes a key from the basket.)

MRS. MOXON. This is the key of the linen chest—(puts it back and produces another)—and this is the key of the—

MOXON (interrupting her awkwardly). Martha ! I begin to see that for years I've not been as kind as I might have been. You didn't think I didn't love you, did you ?

MRS. MOXON. We seem not to have thought of that lately. It's so long since you and I had a real talk.

(*Puts the basket on the ottoman. She watches him, hardly daring to hope.*)

MOXON (*turning to her*). I can't let you go. I can't. Martha, suppose we go together and see the boys.

MRS. MOXON. Oh, yes, George—let us go and see the boys. (*They embrace.*)

CURTAIN.

END OF VOL. I







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